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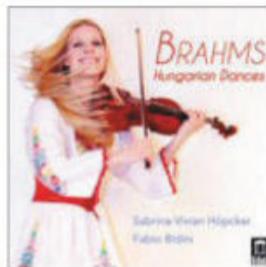
A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

Brahms

Hungarian Dances, Wo01 (arr Joachim)

Sabrina-Vivian Höpcker *vn* Fabio Bidini *pf*

Delos (F) DE3558 (60' • DDD)



One usually thinks of Brahms's *Hungarian Dances* as light music, but evidently Sabrina-Vivian Höpcker does not. The levity and whimsy depicted in the photos of her gracing this release's back cover and booklet belie her often monumental approach to Joachim's effective arrangements for violin and piano.

The very first dance is a harbinger of things to come, where Höpcker's deliberation and heavy sonority not only run counter to the music's *Allegro molto* directive but also convey nothing of the idiom's verve and abandon. No 2's main theme contains fast-note up-beats that are supposed to surge ahead, rather than to be pondered over in Höpcker's manner. She imposes expressive devices throughout No 3 that are calculated to the point where you can predict them. While No 4 can stand being milked for tragic underpinnings, I prefer the dignified restraint and simplicity of Marat Bisengaliev's recording (Naxos, 3/96). Höpcker's forthright delivery of the famous No 5 does no harm but her italicised and overwrought way with No 6's rubato is nothing less than a caricature, as is No 7's opening section.

To be fair, there are times when Höpcker's grand rhetorical gestures work to the music's advantage, notably in her convincingly massive and orchestrally inspired rendition of No 14. So do the minutely calibrated ensemble values in No 13, where Höpcker and pianist Fabio Bidini work hand-in-glove matching their *sotto voce* articulation; indeed, Bidini follows all of Höpcker's pushing, pulling and tugging to the proverbial nines. Höpcker does her best work when she gets out of her own way and channels vigour through direct means, as No 10 bears out. However, Höpcker's artistic

GRAMOPHONE talks to ...

Sandro Russo

The Italian pianist discusses his album 'Images et Mirages', an anniversary tribute to Debussy

How did you choose the specific homages to Debussy by Schmitt, Dukas and Falla?

I came across these homages while exploring *Le tombeau de Claude Debussy*, the collective work written as a posthumous tribute to the master in 1920. While some of these pieces don't speak to me, those by these three composers intrigued me from the start. I wasn't so interested in finding homages that were imitative of Debussy's style, but in works that assert their own language.

Why did you select Debussy's Images?

The two books of *Images* sit in the heart of Debussy's piano oeuvre and the conciseness of their three-movement structure enables a unique blend of past, present and future. The middle movements of both sets are indeed a revisitation of ancient times and all of these pieces stand as milestones in the development of 20th-century piano-writing. They are also representative of Debussy's innermost artistic world.



Is Leonard Borwick's arrangement of the Prélude à L'après midi d'un faune rewarding?

Without question! Borwick's arrangement exalts the pianistic nature of the work and has a certain voluptuousness. I was aware of three other transcriptions, but I chose Borwick's because it's the most faithful to Debussy's two-piano version and the one that best recreates a 'French sound'.

Which pianists have inspired you?

Definitely Michelangeli, specifically his *Images*, which was one of the first recordings to make an impression on me in my early teens, and must have influenced my own interpretation. Later, Zimerman's recording of the *Préludes* and, for different reasons, Debussy's own piano rolls had a similar impact.

limitations begin to hit home in No 16, especially when measuring her stinging, over-intense use of vibrato next to the tonal variety that transpires through Oscar Shumsky's seemingly understated yet subtly sophisticated traversal (Nimbus/MusicMasters). While you won't hear a more opulently engineered edition of the Brahms/Joachim *Hungarian Dances* than this one, Shumsky's less alluringly recorded cycle remains the one to have. And, for a download bargain, Aaron Rosand's similarly stylish versions are coupled with his excellent performances of Brahms's three violin sonatas (Musical Concepts).

Jed Distler

Byron

Fabric for String Noise^a. Dragon Rite^b

^aJames Bergman *db* ^bString Noise

(Conrad Harris, Pauline Kim-Harris *vns*)

Cold Blue Music (F) CB0054 (29' • DDD)

Fink

Celesta

Michael Jon Fink *celesta*

Cold Blue Music (F) CB0053 (33' • DDD)





Michael Jon Fink *Celesta*

A suite of 12 elegant, transcendent, gem-like celesta solos performed by the composer.

The *Los Angeles Times* has described Fink's music as "LUSTROUS," "METAPHYSICALLY TINGED," and "UNAPOLOGETICALLY TRANQUIL."

LA Weekly has written that his music is "of ETHEREAL SIMPLICITY ... it is distinctly his own."

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Michael Byron *Fabric for String Noise*

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Highlights from among Cold Blue's recent releases ...



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Peter Garland *Moon Viewing Music (Inscrutable Stillness Studies #1)*

Featuring percussionist extraordinaire William Winant

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Daniel Lentz *River of 1,000 Streams*

Featuring noted new-music pianist Vicki Ray

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John Luther Adams *The Wind in High Places*

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"Each [Cold Blue CD] emerges from a recognizable and distinctly American compositional outlook, sensual and approachable while also robustly individualistic and aesthetically self-determining."—*The Wire*



String Noise: violinists Conrad Harris and Pauline Kim-Harris perform music by Michael Byron

The three compositions on these two new – half-filled – releases (best thought of as CD singles) each explore a single, specific extreme of instrumental texture, with rather different results. The disc devoted to Michael Byron (b1953) is the more fascinating of the two, pairing a recent two-part work for two violins, *Fabric for String Noise* (2018), with the very early *Dragon Rite* (1973), a lugubrious but poetic quartet in one movement for double basses, here performed by a single, multitracked bassist, James Bergman.

String Noise is the name of the ‘Classical, avant-punk violin duo’ (as per their website) Conrad Harris and Pauline Kim-Harris, and *Fabric* is one of the newest of over 50 works written for them. They throw off its tightly woven micro-polyphony and polyrhythmic intricacies with jaw-dropping virtuosity, all the more remarkably since the music sticks to the very highest register of the instruments. Running for 21 minutes, this is taxing for both players and listeners, yet compels attention. Even better is *Dragon Rite*, operating at the other extreme of the string family’s range and adding quarter-tones to the mix. The sound for both works is a touch hard but clear.

According to the selected worklist on his website, Michael Jon Fink (b1954) has been composing unaccompanied celesta pieces since 1981 at least. Cold Blue Music’s other new issue comes with no booklet or information (not even dates of composition), but the label’s website confirms that the 12-movement *Celesta* is of new, unrecorded pieces and, ‘taken as a whole, as a suite, is perhaps the largest statement for the celesta as a solo instrument’, noting also – immodestly – that it was ‘Beautifully recorded on one of LA’s finest five-octave Schiedmayer celestas’.

Although a wonderfully euphonious instrument, the celesta is expressively limited, its gentle tintinnabulations smoothing out all but the most aggressive discords. It is, then, a shame that Fink has not written something more musically challenging for it. Too often, meandering melodic lines, pleasing in their own rather anonymous way, are harmonised in the most rudimentary manner. Only in the concluding, brief ‘After the End’ is there any glimmer of harmonic subtlety; too little, much too late. It is all nicely recorded but even as background music the result is curiously dull. **Guy Rickards**

Glass

‘Three Pieces in the Shape of a Square’
Gradus. Melodies. Piece in the Shape of a Square (all arr Morris)

Craig Morris *tpt*
 Bridge Ⓛ BRIDGE9508 (52' • DDD)



Craig Morris’s Grammy-nominated tribute to Philip Glass, who was honoured

in December at the Kennedy Center alongside Cher, Reba McEntire and Wayne Shorter, features flugelhorn, trumpet and piccolo trumpet versions of music written originally for either saxophone or flutes. Principal of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and now professor at the Frost School of Music in Miami, Morris celebrates the half-century anniversaries of *Gradus*, written while Glass was studying with tabla master Allah Rakha, and the original flute version of *Piece in the Shape of a Square*, played at the premiere by Glass himself and Jon Gibson.

The disc’s highlight, however, is the only recording in any version of the composer’s uncharacteristically varied *Melodies* from 1995, whose moods encompass sentimental,



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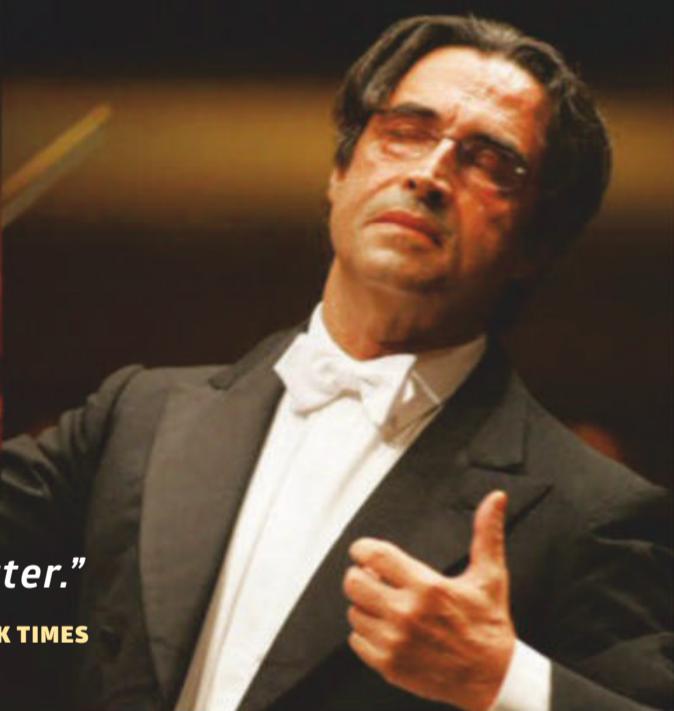
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Trumpeter Craig Morris plays his own arrangement of Philip Glass's *Piece in the Shape of a Square*, originally for two flutes

wispy and tipsy before becoming downright eloquent. To this and the more minimalist music written 20 years before, Morris brings a bulletproof technique burnished with subtle nuances of colour and rhythm.

The 11 minutes of *Gradus* provides a thrilling, highly addictive overdubbing tour de force, recorded in what seems to be one impossibly long continuous breath; it was one of the first pieces Glass composed upon his return to New York under the influence of Nadia Boulanger and Ravi Shankar. And, as the booklet photograph shows (see above), Morris kept true to the disorientating spirit of *Piece in the Shape of a Square*, where in the original version two performers, one on the inside and one on the outside of a circle of 30 music stands, play while circling in opposite directions.

The audiophile sound was recorded at Mechanics Hall in Worcester, MA, and Morris himself provides the excellent booklet notes. **Laurence Vittes**

Gompper

Double Concerto, 'Dialogue'^a.

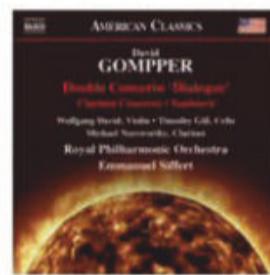
Clarinet Concerto^b. *Sunburst*

^bMichael Norsworthy *cl*

^aWolfgang David *vn* ^aTimothy Gill *vc*

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra / Emmanuel Siffert

Naxos American Classics M 8 559835 (62' • DDD)



David Gompper (b1954) is currently Professor of Composition at the University of Iowa but his academic career has taken in London, Nigeria and (via a Fulbright Scholarship) Russia. Stylistically, the three works here do not strike me as particularly international in outlook or distinctive in terms of personal voice, but they are certainly satisfying in their own terms. His idiom is free-tonally based, although can incorporate formulaic elements as his expressive needs dictate.

All three works are single-movement designs. The Double Concerto *Dialogue* (2016) took three phases of work to complete from a much briefer 2011 original. The cello (which opens the work stratospherically high) and violin – superbly played by Timothy Gill and Wolfgang David respectively – are the dominant elements, the orchestra acting as 'amplifier and resonator'. The Clarinet Concerto (2013-14) was also reworked, from the clarinet-and-piano *Traceur* (2011), both deriving from the art of parkour. The soloist, here the nimble-

tongued and -fingered Michael Norsworthy, negotiates vividly orchestral obstacles and landscapes like a 'traceur' free-running through a city.

The inspiration for *Sunburst* (2014-15) came from mathematics: the Farey sequence, used to plot designs – such as a starburst – on a matrix or lattice. Gompper talks in his notes of its 'explosive colours', 'active textures as if heard in an echo chamber' and a 'meditative and steady "implosion" of the main harmonic and melodic ideas', culminating in music 'possibly suggestive of the "reach" of solar flares into the void'. The music is less volatile than that description implies; one hopes the companion *Moonburst* and *Starburst*, slated for a future release, prove more exciting. The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Emmanuel Siffert take it all in their stride and Naxos's sound is exemplary. **Guy Rickards**

Jirásek

'When the Soul Speaks'

Missa propria. *Mondi paralleli*.

Tam, kde sláva nepřestává^a

Bonifantes Boys Choir;

^aCzech Soloist Consort / Jan Míšek

Navona F NV6205 (46' • DDD)

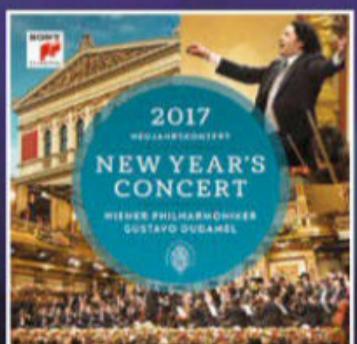
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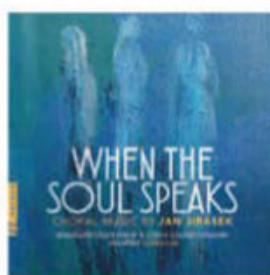
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Jan Jirásek's current representation on disc is quite modest, his most popular recorded work undoubtedly the austere *Missa propria* (1991-95), sung here – as on Catalyst (nla but reissued by ArkivMusic) – by *a cappella* boys' chorus; the version for girls' chorus (1997) is available on Navona's 'Parallel Worlds' (NV6101), which similarly includes an alternative version of the motet cycle *Mondi paralleli* (2006-09).

Missa propria catches one's attention as well as any better-known modern liturgical setting. Structured as a triptych, after an impressive *Kyrie eleison* Jirásek (b1955) dispenses with the *Sanctus*, embeds the *Miserere* within the *Gloria* and concatenates the *Credo* and *Agnus Dei*. There is an over-reliance on vocal portamentos in the later sections, a trait not repeated in the lighter-toned *Mondi paralleli*, seven brief settings of Latin texts (the *Miserere* again, *Benedictus*, *Sanctus*, *Agnus Dei*, *Te Deum* and *Dona nobis pacem*) interspersed with phrases from Buddhism, Islam and Judaism. After the Mass's sombre tones it makes valuable textural contrast, but its avowedly inclusive message should not be overlooked.

Most exciting of all, though, is the motet-triptych *Tam, kde sláva nepřestává* ('Where glory ends not'), derived from three of the oldest pieces of Czech music and concluding in an electrifying battle for chorus, flutes, bass trombones and drums based on 'Ye who are warriors of God'. This and all the works are winningly performed, captured in bright, clear sound. A little short-measure at 46 minutes but well worth buying. **Guy Rickards**

Psathas

'The John Psathas Percussion Project, Vol 1' Aegean. *Corybas*. *Drum Dances*. *Jettatura*^a. *Matre's Dance*^b. *Muisca*^c. *Piano Quintet*^d
^dDaniel Koppelman pf Percussion ensemble (Justin Alexander, Brian Baldauff, Tommy Dobbs, Emma Gierszal, Justin Lamb, Melinda Leoce, Brian Nozny, Ryan Patterson, Luis Rivera) /
 Omar Carmenates ^{ac}vibraphone/^amarimba/^bperc Navona Ⓛ NV6204 (62' • DDD)



I first encountered the music of John Psathas, a New Zealand composer

of Greek heritage born in 1966, on Evelyn Glennie's 'lively and tonally varied' album 'Drumming' (Catalyst, 7/96, reviewed by Rob Cowan). The work featured there, *Matre's Dance* (1991), is a vivid duet inspired by an episode in the later *Dune* novels by Frank Herbert. Conceived originally as a violin solo, its transformation into a percussion-and-piano duo was wholly convincing. It reappears here – as with all seven works – in an authorised arrangement made in 2015 by Omar Carmenates, Professor of Percussion at Furman University, Greenville, South Carolina. And it works terrifically well.

That is a tribute to the quality of the performances by the crack percussion ensemble gathered together by Carmenates, a superb player evident enough in his solo playing: vibraphone in *Muisca* – which started out as a guitar duo – doubling on marimba in *Jettatura* (originally a 1999 piano solo) as well as the percussion soloist in *Matre's Dance*. However, this really is an ensemble disc, appreciated most fully in the ensemble works, the opening *Corybas* and concluding *Aegean* (both created as piano trios in 2011), which weave their mesmeric percussive way more convincingly than their original guises.

Several of the original versions of the works have been recorded already and/or are accessible in YouTube recordings. These new, superbly rendered performances match any of their competitors. This is especially true of the *Piano Quintet*, where – as in *Muisca* – the string-based parts set down in 2000 are transmogrified into a wholly new work, whereas in *Drum Dances* (1993) the original piano accompaniment is relatively straightforwardly transcribed for percussion. Navona's sound is top-notch. We all need a little bit of percussion in our lives, and this fits the bill splendidly. **Guy Rickards**

‘Images et Mirages’

'Hommage à Debussy'
Debussy Images. *Lindaraja* (arr Roger-Ducasse). *Nocturnes - Fêtes* (arr Leyetchkiss). *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune* (arr Borwick). *Three Songs* (arr Attwood/Ericourt) *Dukas* *La plainte, au loin, du faune ... Falla Hommage à Debussy*
Schmitt Mirages, Op 70 - *À la mémoire de Claude Debussy*
 Sandro Russo pf
 Steinway & Sons Ⓛ STNS30105 (71' • DDD)



Here's a late entry among 2018's numerous Debussy anniversary offerings, featuring pianist Sandro Russo in *Images* Books 1 and 2, alongside myriad transcriptions plus pieces by other composers written in homage to Debussy. 'Reflets dans l'eau' gains contrast and nuance as it progresses, if never quite attaining the liveness and shimmer of Michelangeli or Moravec. By contrast, the steadiness and classical reserve of 'Hommage à Rameau' is right on the money. Russo controls the swirling patterns of 'Mouvements' perfectly, yet I miss the sheer exhilaration and harmonic shadings distinguishing the Bavouzet and Aimard traversals. Somehow Book 2's relatively abstract idiom elicits more responsive and flexible pianism from Russo, which was also the case for Stephen Hough's 2018 *Images* cycle, notably in the playful accents and petulant crescendos of 'Poissons d'or'.

Russo casts diverse light and shade on the intricate piano-writing throughout Schmitt's tribute piece, while idiomatically peppering up the little Dukas tribute with just the right dose of sultry spice. In the Dukas, the pianist keeps the decorative filigree and gently insistent tolling repeated notes in consistent three-dimensional perspective. The variety of colour that he draws out of Leonard Borwick's *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune* transcription impresses even more when you realise how discreetly Russo pedals.

Anyone who can get through the difficult and cruelly exposed hurdles in Vladimir Leyetchkiss's transcription of 'Fêtes' with Russo's relaxed aplomb has my admiration, but I wish he had imparted more bite and momentum to the central march section. Yet Russo's effortless foreground/background delineation of *Lindaraja* in Jean Roger-Ducasse's solo version makes you forget the original two-piano scoring. Expertly crafted and musically satisfying as the Attwood and Ericourt song transcriptions may be, one still loses the conversational character of Debussy's word-settings. Once again, Russo reveals a knack for unusual and ear-catching programme concepts and for writing succinct, informative booklet notes. A fine release, overall. **Jed Distler**

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Pictured: Violinist Janine Jansen (DECCA) © Marco Borggreve) who featured on the January 2016 cover of Gramophone. Full annual retail price for print only (13 issues) is \$142.87; print only annual subscription or Digital Edition or Reviews Database (\$101); Digital Club (\$134); Gramophone Club (\$167). If choosing a print option, an additional overseas P+P charge will be added at \$35.75 (Outside EU). If you have a subscription enquiry then please email subscriptions@markallengroup.com

Meeting artists – from pages to podcasts

There are two ways of writing about classical music, particularly music on record. One is to focus on repertoire, without which of course bows would lie idle, keys unpressed and voices silent. The other is to explore it via the musicians who perform it. Because however much artists might claim that they're merely servants of the composer, when you put on a recording of Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin, you're not just listening to Bach, you're listening to, say, Hilary Hahn's Bach – or Giuliano Carmignola's, or the Bach of Rachel Podger, Alina Ibragimova, Itzhak Perlman, Yehudi Menuhin or whoever it might be. They each interpret the music in their own unique way. Otherwise, you'd never need a second recording of any piece of music, and our reviews pages and the entire recording industry would be pretty much redundant.

That is why, in *Gramophone*, at the root and heart of everything we write are the people behind the music-making. Take the diverse figures in this month's main features. Riccardo Chailly, who through 40 years on Decca and in roles at the helm of some of the world's finest musical institutions, has indelibly shaped ensembles and audiences alike. Or Kirill Gerstein, whose questing approach to repertoire makes him one of today's most compelling pianists. Or the multi-faceted team behind the recording of a major modern work – composer (in this case Gabriel Jackson), conductor, producer, performers, libretto arranger ...

We meet even more artists in our weekly podcasts, the most recent including the thrilling virtuosos, pianist Jan Lisiecki and violinist Hilary Hahn. Our



podcasts are free – you can subscribe wherever you usually get your podcasts. My interview with Hahn had a memorable coda. We'd discussed the way that Bach's music, despite – or perhaps because of – its profound spiritual depth, lends itself better than almost anything else to such a wide variety of situations. Hahn performs solo Bach every day, whether that be on the Wigmore Hall stage, at children's concerts, or even knitting circles – but it's quite clear that each occasion is just as valid as any other. 'You don't have to engage with all the analytical side of it in order to have a personal experience listening to it,' she reflected. 'I say personal experience, because every person listening is coming from a different place to be there that day, there's a different thing that happened to them that morning, there's a different thing they just walked in from.' And I then got to experience one of her daily Bach performances. We'd met at the studios of Classic FM, part of Global Radio, where, on a Friday afternoon, as in many organisations, company-wide colleagues gather to socialise. This time they got an impromptu recital from Hahn as well. She introduced the *Andante* from Bach's Second Sonata as a meditative way to draw the week's events together, and as she played, it was extraordinary how the dynamic in the room changed, as people were indeed drawn in, drawn together, reflectively, and respectfully. A reminder of just how important such open-hearted ambassadors for music as Hilary Hahn are. And a wonderful reminder, if one were needed, that it's not just the music that matters, it's the people behind it too.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'Talking to Richard Chailly about a lifetime of musical exploration is always a real pleasure,' says

NEIL FISHER, author of this month's cover feature, which focuses on the conductor's 40-year relationship with Decca. 'And this time he threw in a splendid Milanese lunch as well!'



JEREMY NICHOLAS, who interviews him for us this issue, 'but the over-arching theme of our conversation was the importance to him of personal and musical relationships and connections.'



'Comparing notes with Vadym Kholodenko on Prokofiev's First Piano Concerto was a true pleasure,' recalls **MICHELLE ASSAY**, who interviews him for *The Musican* and *the Score*. 'Apart from all the musical insights, such encounters are a great reminder of the practical issues that artists have to keep in mind too.'

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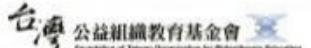
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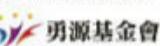
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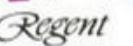
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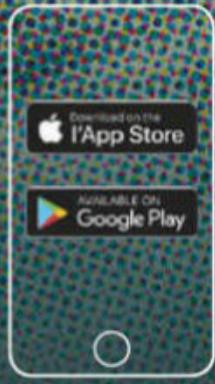


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Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews

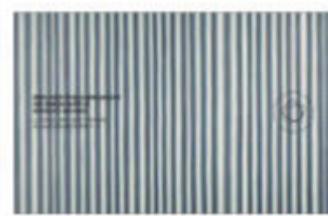


RECORDING OF THE MONTH



JS BACH Das wohltemperirte Clavier, Book 1
Ewa Pobłocka pf
 Fryderyk Chopin Institute
 ▶ **JED DISTLER'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 32**

Ewa Pobłocka may not be among the most familiar names, but this is simply wonderful Bach-playing, by turns effervescent and consoling, musically imaginative and pianistically resourceful.



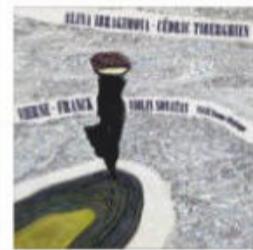
BEETHOVEN
 Complete
 Piano Concertos
Mitsuko Uchida pf
 Berlin Philharmonic

Orchestra / Sir Simon Rattle

Berliner Philharmoniker

Such stylish artists grab one's attention before you even press play – promise which is more than fulfilled here.

▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 34**



FRANCK. VIERNE

Violin Sonatas
Alina Ibragimova vn
Cédric Tiberghien pf
 Hyperion

That Alina Ibragimova

offers an interpretation of supreme skill and musicality is a given with anything she turns her hand to; this programme with Cédric Tiberghien is no exception.

▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 53**



LISZT Études d'exécution transcendante

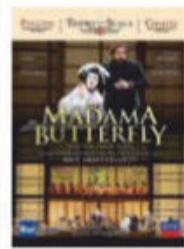
Andrey Gugnin pf

Piano Classics

Andrey Gugnin's playing leaves

one somewhat in awe of his complete command over the instrument and his musical vision, whether the music calls for tenderness, power or full-flight virtuosity.

▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 68**



DVD/BLU-RAY

PUCCINI Madama Butterfly
 Sols; Chorus and Orchestra of La Scala, Milan / Riccardo Chailly
 Decca

What better way to explore the art of our cover artist Riccardo Chailly than with an Italian operatic masterpiece – albeit in a slightly unfamiliar form.

▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 87**



SIBELIUS
 Symphony No 1. En saga
 Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra /
 Santtu-Matias Rouvali
 Alpha

The Gothenburg SO's young conductor Santtu-Matias Rouvali masterminds some truly thrilling Sibelius, performed with a compelling drive and attention to detail.

▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 43**



MYASKOVSKY. RACHMANINOV
 Cello Sonatas
Bruno Philippe vc
Jérôme Ducros pf
 Harmonia Mundi

Bruno Philippe plays with a beautiful sound (superbly captured), rich in dark tone and colour, while the rapport with pianist Jérôme Ducros is very fine.

▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 54**



OFFENBACH
 'Colorature'
Jodie Devos sop
 Munich Radio Orchestra /
 Laurent Campellone
 Alpha

This is an absolute delight – Jodie Devos's soprano, and personality, fizzles, soars and beguiles across this album, with a carefree ease that only comes from supreme skill.

▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 87**



BEACH. C SCHUMANN.
 SMYTH Works for Violin and Piano
Tasmin Little vn
John Lenehan pf
 Chandos

Tasmin Little may have announced her retirement, but before then this album – and I hope others still to come – continues her significant contribution to recording.

▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 50**



HAYDN Piano Sonatas
Kristian Bezuidenhout pf
 Harmonia Mundi
 Kristian Bezuidenhout makes a wonderful virtue of the

unique soundworld offered by his excellent sounding fortepiano, as he takes us through the light and shade of Haydn's sonatas

▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 64**



VIVALDI Il Giustino
 Sols; Accademia Bizantina / Ottavio Dantone
 Naïve
 Ottavio Dantone conducts this opera

with a powerful grip on the score's narrative, while Delphine Galou, with her dramatically characterful contralto, leads a strong cast.

▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 90**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE
 'BERLIN RADIO RECORDINGS, VOL 3'
Jorge Bolet pf
 Audite

The third and final volume in Audite's series of Jorge Bolet's Berlin Radio Recordings is another winner.

▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 66**

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FOR THE RECORD

Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla signs to DG

Deutsche Grammophon has announced that it has signed Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, Music Director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, on an exclusive long-term contract.

In recording with DG, the 32-year-old Lithuanian follows in the footsteps of the likes of Herbert von Karajan, Claudio Abbado and Andris Nelsons, and becomes the first female conductor to sign an exclusive long-term contract with the Yellow label.

Gražinytė-Tyla will release her first DG recording – a collection of orchestral works by Polish composer Mieczysław Weinberg – in May. This will include Weinberg's Symphony No 21, *Kaddish* – a work dedicated to victims of the Warsaw Ghetto – with the joint forces of the CBSO, Kremerata Baltica and violin maestro Gidon Kremer.

Subsequent projects will include a recording of music by her compatriot Raminta Šerkšnytė with the Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra, Vilnius Municipal Choir and Kremerata Baltica, and another album with the CBSO to mark the orchestra's centenary featuring works by various 20th-century British composers.

‘Deutsche Grammophon was part of my musical upbringing,’ said Gražinytė-Tyla. ‘It’s a genuine honour to join DG and to record works that will be new to so many listeners. I look forward to this thrilling collaboration with DG and to the musical discoveries we can make together.’

Gražinytė-Tyla was appointed Musical Director of the CBSO in 2016 at the age of 29, a move which has been widely seen to continue the ensemble’s excellent recent record in choosing its chief conductors. Her move to Deutsche Grammophon is a further step towards replicating the success of her predecessors Andris Nelsons, Sakari Oramo and Sir Simon Rattle.



Martin James Bartlett joins Warner Classics

Former BBC Young Musician of the Year winner Martin James Bartlett has signed to Warner Classics.

His debut album, titled ‘Love and Death’, will be released on the label on May 3, and will see the 22-year-old perform works by Prokofiev, JS Bach, Liszt, Schumann, Wagner and Granados.

‘I’m absolutely thrilled to have signed with Warner Classics and to release my debut album,’ Bartlett said. ‘Love and death are two elemental themes that have inspired breathtaking masterpieces from poets and composers for centuries.’

The idea for the album derives from Liszt’s transcription of Schumann’s *Widmung*, set to the poetry of Friedrich Rückert. ‘It’s a love song that also speaks of death, and ends with the piano

quoting Schubert’s *Ave Maria*, introducing the idea of heavenly love,’ Bartlett explained.

This diametric opposition permeates the entire recording, with Liszt’s *Liebestraum* No 3 and his transcription of Isolde’s Liebestod from Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* also featuring. Bartlett’s performance of *Widmung* will be released in advance of the album in April for streaming.



Scala Radio launches

On March 4, the UK will have a new radio station that plays classical music. Scala Radio, launched by Bauer Media, aims to be a station with the feel of BBC Radio 2 but with classical music instead of pop. Among the line-up of presenters announced are Simon Mayo (mid-morning), Mark Kermode, Charles Nove, Mark Forrest, Sam Hughes, Jamie Crick and the 19-year-old Jack Pepper.

‘We’ve completely reimagined a format, and designed it to appeal to a modern audience. This will be the very best in classical music for today,’ said Steve Parkinson, Bauer Group MD, National Radio.

For more information, visit scalaradio.co.uk

Royal Concertgebouw has a new home



Amsterdam’s Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra has a new home, RCO House, at Gabriël Metsustraat, just across the Museumplein from the Concertgebouw where the orchestra will continue to give its concerts. RCO House contains 10 acoustically insulated studios which will allow orchestral musicians to rehearse there rather than having to rely on renting space elsewhere. The building, which dates from 1908, was originally an art school for girls. The largest space, the Amsterdam Hall, provides a space for chamber music, introductions to concerts, auditions and educational activities. RCO House also has reception rooms, offices and conference rooms, and a common room where musicians, staff and friends of the orchestra can meet. Workshops for schools will be held at RCO House, as well as a public event every month. The venue will be officially opened on Thursday January 17 with live radio and TV broadcasts.

More plans for new LSO home unveiled

There is a site: at the southern tip of the Barbican complex, where the Museum of London is currently located, and offered in principle by the City of London Corporation. Roads would be driven into a tunnel and a new pedestrian plaza created. It would become a 'southern gateway' to the proposed Culture Mile.

And now there are designs. Created by Diller Scofidio + Renfro, the architects whose arts projects include New York's soon-to-open The Shed cultural centre, the proposed building would position a 2000-seat concert hall at the heart of a tall structure; above it would rise several stories of commercial space, and above that a restaurant and, topping the structure, a more intimate concert venue with views across the London skyline.

The hall itself, designed in wood and inspired by the form of geological structures, would position the audience in clusters (each no bigger than the orchestra) around the stage. Transparent 'education pods' with views of the hall would allow schoolchildren to observe rehearsals.



'Audience clusters': London's proposed concert hall

There still remains, however, the challenge of raising the estimated £288m needed to pay for the cost of the hall. The commercial spaces will cover additional expenditure and go on to support the running of the building, making it free of the need for ongoing public subsidy.

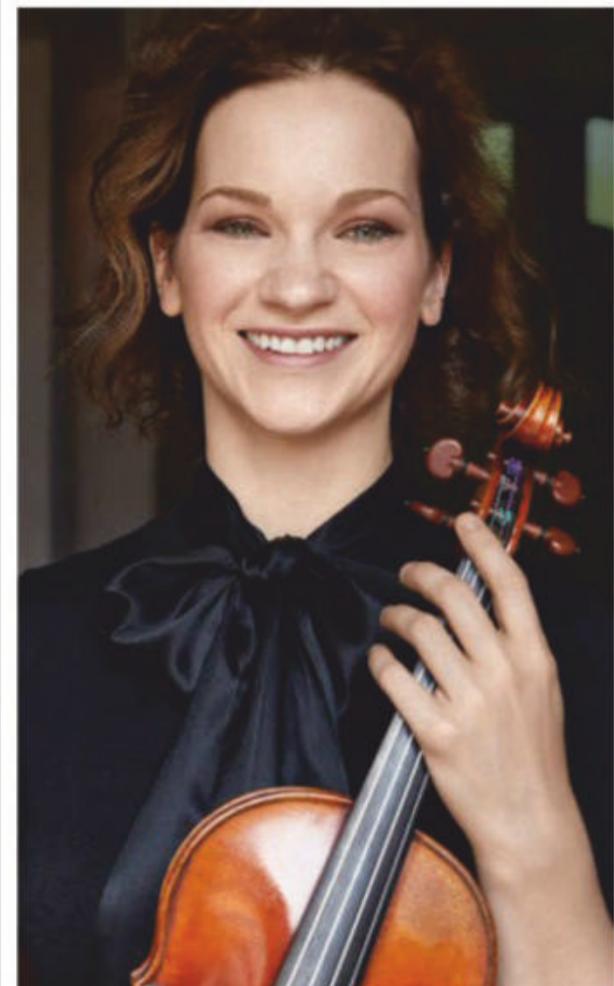
The hope is that the venue, which would provide a new home for the LSO, will address the Barbican's challenges of acoustics and access. The centre would be designed to suggest (and indeed achieve) a tangible sense of accessibility, with highly visible public areas used for events.

GRAMOPHONE Online

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Podcasts

Gramophone's series continues with three fascinating podcasts. Christian Gerhaher and Gerold Huber, his long-time pianist partner, have embarked on a Schumann Lieder project (see last month's Recording of the Month), so James Jolly caught up with Gerhaher to talk about his passion for Schumann and his belief that every group of songs under a single opus is a cycle.



Hilary Hahn (pictured) has become closely associated with Bach; Editor Martin Cullingford talks to her about the process of making her new recording of the composer's music.

And finally, James Jolly meets two young pianists for a further pair of fascinating podcasts: Roman Rabinovich, whose recent Wigmore Hall recital provided a good opportunity to discuss Haydn's unexplored piano repertoire; and Gramophone's 2013 Young Artist Award winner Jan Lisiecki, who talks about exploring Mendelssohn.

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ONE TO WATCH

Andrey Gugnin Piano

Andrey Gugnin's recording of Liszt's *Études d'exécution transcendante* on Piano Classics (reviewed on page 68) gives another cause to celebrate the talent that emerged from the 2016 Sydney Piano Competition. Gugnin came away with the first prize, placed above Arseny Tarasevich-Nikolaev (whose debut disc was an Editor's Choice last month). Gugnin, who turns 32 this year, impressed with musical performances of works often treated merely as virtuoso showpieces, especially in competitions, including a shapely performance of Balakirev's *Islamey* full of interior interest, and a supple and poetic account of Chopin's Op 25 Études devoid of rhetorical bombast.

In his review of Gugnin's Liszt, Patrick Rucker commends his 'pliant and organic rubato' and 'exquisitely calibrated dynamic spectrum'. These are traits found in many of his performances on YouTube, including an outstanding account of Liszt's transcription of Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony. It is apparent that Gugnin's natural instincts are to use his luxurious technique as a means to thoroughly musical ends, which bodes well for his



longevity in a world not short of technically well-drilled pianists.

Andrey Gugnin's next recording will be on Hyperion, a disc of Shostakovich (including the Preludes, Op 34, and the two Piano Sonatas), due to be released later this year. This will hopefully be the start of a fruitful relationship with the label, known for its roster of outstanding pianists and for exploring interesting repertoire.



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ARTISTS & their INSTRUMENTS

John Kitchen on the Usher Hall organ

“ The Usher Hall in Edinburgh opened in 1914, and a large Romantic concert organ by Norman and Beard was installed at the outset. It is generally referred to as being in an Edwardian style (even although Edward VII died in 1910) because that word seems to sum up its confidence, opulence, manner of voicing and solidity of construction: ‘built like a battleship’, as they say, with a wonderful console in Spanish mahogany. It began to malfunction and fell into disuse in the 1970s, when its style was considered out of date; everyone then wanted neo-classical organs. But the tide of fashion turned in the 1990s and such instruments began once again to be appreciated for their own intrinsic qualities. Support grew for its restoration, and it was returned to its former glory, without alteration, by Harrison and Harrison in 2003; it is now a rare example of a large, unaltered N&B. At that time I was appointed City Organist, in which role I give regular lunchtime concerts, covering a variety of musical styles.

We have made a number of solo recordings, three with Delphian Records. These reflect the varied nature of the music played in these concerts, which offer a combination of ‘proper’ organ music and transcriptions, for which this organ, with its many orchestral tone colours and wide dynamic range, is

ideally suited. Most Romantic organ music sounds well, especially that of the English school: Elgar, Hollins, Whitlock, Parry, Stanford; Widor, Vierne and Guilmant and the French school sound well, if the organ doesn’t quite have the required fizz and éclat for French music; Mendelssohn, Liszt and Reger are effective. Bach has to be played with a Romantic accent (I have even used the tuba); Handel transcriptions in the grand manner are ideal, and very popular with concert-goers.

Usher Hall audiences are used to hearing unlikely juxtapositions. A recent concert ranged from astringent Kenneth Leighton to Offenbach’s can-can; in another ‘audience request’ programme, Messiaen rubbed shoulders with Andrew Lloyd Webber’s *Joseph*. We also have recitals which concentrate on one composer. By contrast, the audiences sometimes hear new music,



including the wonderful *Church Bells Beyond the Stars* by Cecilia McDowall. We have recorded transcriptions of Walton, Holst and Sullivan; along with Sullivan favourites, we recorded original light music and arrangements by the late Aberdeen-based composer, organist and cinema organist Michael Thomson. The UH instrument is not a cinema organ, but it has quite a lot of the appropriate sounds, and it was great fun recording his *Salute to Busby Berkeley* – very much in cinema organ style – as well as original pieces in the Scottish style, including the strathspey, *Whirly-Granny*. The Usher Hall organ is nothing if not versatile! ”

‘British Light Music’ is reviewed on page 69

IN THE STUDIO

● **Pekka Kuusisto** has, earlier this month, recorded Daniel Bjarnason’s Violin Concerto with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra under the baton of the composer. The recording, for the Sono Luminus label, took place in Reykjavik and will likely form part of an all-Bjarnason disc, the release date of which is still to be confirmed.

● Young Korean violinist **Joo Yeon Sir** was at Wathen Hall, St Paul’s School, Barnes (in south-west London) last year to record a ‘Chaconnes, Divertimento & Rhapsodies’ recital programme for Rubicon Classics. Featuring music by Bach, Stravinsky and Bartók, among others, the disc will be released in May.

● The **Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin** were in Berlin at the beginning of February recording Handel’s Op 6. The resulting two CDs (of DSD audio quality) will be released by Pentatone later this year.

● The **Carducci Quartet** were joined by soprano **Mary Bevan** and tenor **Allan Clayton** in Oxford last month to record chamber music by Ian Venables. On January 17 and 18, the musicians gathered at St Michael’s, Summertown, Oxford to record songs including the

cantata *Remember This*, Op 40 and *Through These Pale Cold Days*, Op 46 for tenor, viola and piano. The recording, on Signum Classics, is likely to be released later in the year.

● A fascinating violin-and-piano recording for First Hand Records is taking place in Athens in April. Featuring violinist **Vaughan Jones** and pianist **Alexandra Papastefanou**, ‘The History of the Salon’ comprises 24 works written between 1823 to 1910, many of which are premiere recordings. Says label director David Murphy, ‘Revising these brilliantly written pieces gives the listener a deeper understanding of popular musical styles and tastes in the 19th century.’

● May is a busy month for Supraphon, with two major recordings taking place in Prague. The first sees the **Pavel Haas Quartet** recording Shostakovich’s Quartets Nos 2, 7 and 8 from May 11-31; the album will be released in September. The second sees pianist **Jan Bartoš** record piano concertos by Novák and Schumann, accompanied by the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra under **Jakub Hruša**. The sessions will take place at Czech Radio’s Studio No 1 from May 23-24, and the results will be released in the first half of 2020.

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GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO ...

Cantata

Richard Wigmore explores the vocal form that was employed so gloriously by JS Bach

Cantata denotes, simply, music 'to be sung', as opposed to 'sonata', music 'to be played'. Ironic, then, that the composer who took the sacred cantata to its apogee, Johann Sebastian Bach, rarely used the term, titling his Sunday offerings for Leipzig either 'concerto' – denoting combined voices and instruments – or, bluntly, 'Stück' – 'piece'.

Despite late outliers, from Haydn's *Arianna a Naxos* to Bartók's *Cantata Profana* and Britten's *Cantata Academica* and *Cantata Misericordium*, the cantata is a quintessentially Baroque genre. Its first twitchings were the 1620 song collection *Cantade et aria* by the Venetian Alessandro Grandi. But the term only became enshrined around 1650, when Italian composers were producing secular chamber cantatas by the bushel.

Giacomo Carissimi, in Rome, led the way, followed by, inter alia, Stradella and Alessandro Scarlatti, whose 600-odd cantatas combine melodic suavity with harmonic daring. By the 1680s the form had morphed from a simple song with variations to a pattern of mingled recitative, aria and arioso, scored for one or two solo voices with either continuo alone or orchestra.

The subject matter of these aristocratic entertainments was typically pastoral-amorous. From the spats of Arcadian nymphs and swains composers created unstaged miniature operas, in an age when successive popes banned opera as a corrupting force (though they had no qualms about castratos). Even more overtly dramatic were cantatas on mythical or quasi-historical subjects: Carissimi's *Il lamento di Maria di Scozia*; Scarlatti's graphic depiction of the psychopath Nero in *Il Nerone*, or of the grieving Orpheus in *Dall' oscura magion dell'arsa*.

Between 1707 and 1709 Handel delighted his opera-starved Italian patrons with reams of cantatas, modelled on Scarlatti but often surpassing him in lyrical allure. He spectacularly exploited the freakish range of a Neapolitan bass to evoke the terrifying African forest in *Nell'africane selve*. Three outstanding cantatas draw on classical history and myth: the tragic *Lucrezia* and *Armida abbandonata*, and the ravishing, colourfully scored *Apollo e Dafne*.

Across the Alps, Clérambault, Montéclair and others put a Gallic gloss on the Italian cantata (try Clérambault's *Orphée*, airy scored for soprano, flute and violin). Bach, Telemann and their



Sir John Eliot Gardiner who, with his choir and orchestra, spent the millennial year 2000 performing Bach's sacred cantatas

German contemporaries occasionally wrote secular cantatas, most famously the *Coffee Cantata* (the nearest Bach got to comic opera) and *Peasant Cantata*. German composers, though, excelled above all in the sacred cantata that grew out of the solo motet.

Buxtehude and Kuhnau, Bach's Leipzig predecessor, produced finely wrought cantatas in the generation before Bach. Then the game changed. The cantatas Bach composed in Mühlhausen and Weimar, including the *Actus tragicus*, No 106, and the austere beautiful chorale cantata *Christ lag in Todes Banden*, No 4, already make new technical and expressive demands. Here and in the 150 surviving Leipzig cantatas – in effect, sermons-in-music – he spared neither himself, his singers nor his players. No wonder a contemporary protested that Bach required 'singers and instrumentalists to perform with their throats and instruments the same feats he can perform on the clavier'.

Astonishingly varied in design, expression and instrumental colour, Bach's Leipzig cantatas range from solo works like *Jauchzet Gott*, No 51 – a virtuoso concerto for voice and trumpet – and *Ich habe genug*, No 82, with its sublime lullaby on the Pietist metaphor of death-as-sleep, to elaborately worked cantatas based on Lutheran chorales. One of the most overwhelming is No 78, *Jesu, der du meine Seele*: a journey from sin to salvation that opens with a massive, grief-laden chorale fantasia built on a chromatically drooping lamento bass. In this monumental chorus Bach, characteristically, is at once mathematician, orator and visionary, triumphing over a complex compositional challenge in music that combines theological aptness, piercing beauty and profound personal expressiveness. **G**

ORCHESTRA *Insight...*

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Long before specialist orchestras started to pick and choose the precise vintage and nationality of the instruments they might use for a particular repertoire, a civic orchestra in the south of France was doing so and recording the results.

For many, the Toulouse Capitole Orchestra (as it was known before the 'National' was inserted in 1981) was the reference French orchestra of the late 20th century. Under the 35-year stewardship of Michel Plasson, it made over 100 recordings for both EMI and DG, incubators of the ambitious conductor's plan to recultivate a distinctly French orchestral sound using instruments made in the country.

Plasson inherited a relatively new ensemble, formed from the fusion of Toulouse's opera orchestra (a function it still assumes; the opera theatre is inside the Toulouse Capitole) with its modest symphonic ensemble. He fought for the conversion of a hexagonal corn-exchange-turned-boxing-ring into a new concert hall (it became the orchestra's home in 1974) and attracted an audience both local and international. Unusually prescient and business-minded, he even established a family of sponsors, with Airbus at the head of its table.

In the early 1990s, Plasson was telling *Gramophone* that the ONCT was 'the only true French orchestra'. Ironically, a string of reviews that complained of a 'thin' and 'inhibited' sound probably proved his project was working. Soon that sound was recognised for its considered transparency born of the crispness and clarity of French brass and woodwinds. Yes, those strings were meant to sound anti-plush. Plasson would spend six months of the year with his orchestra, drawing comparison in the latter



years with Rattle and his CBSO. All the while, pioneering recordings were coming at a rate of knots: Milhaud, Magnard, Roussel, Bizet, Ropartz, Gounod, Massenet, Debussy and Dutilleux.

It is rare to encounter an orchestra that has had just two music directors since 1968. Tugan Sokhiev was appointed Principal Guest Conductor in 2005 and Music Director three years later. To Plasson's delicacy and very particular ideas about blend, Sokhiev brought standardised instruments, beef, front-foot confidence, rhythmic cut and thrust – much mined from Russian music. Recording activities moved to Naïve, and the partnership's Tchaikovsky Fourth was hailed by Edward Seckerson as 'one of the most impressive accounts since the days of Markevitch and Mravinsky'. In 2011, *Le Figaro* ranked every orchestra in France but awarded the top spot to three: two in Paris, and Sokhiev's ONCT. **Andrew Mellor**
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Tasmin Little: change of direction from 2020

Tasmin Little bows out

Tasmin Little has announced that she will retire next summer, after an impressive 30 years, 40 recordings and 2000 concerts. The violinist assures us it's not goodbye – her commitment to championing music will remain undimmed, as she refocuses on broadcasting, teaching and campaigning. But there's still the chance to see her perform before then, and in the meantime her new recording, a fascinating programme of rare repertoire, is an Editor's Choice this month.

New Ulster conductor

Daniele Rustioni, currently Principal Conductor of the Orchestra della Toscana, has been named as the Ulster Orchestra's new Chief Conductor from September.

See Chailly on Medici

With Riccardo Chailly the focus this month, we delve into the Medici archive for a documentary as well as two concerts. Turning to Puccini, we've a *Turandot* as well as two productions of *La bohème* – one likely to rustle a few feathers (it's set on the moon) and one highly traditional, with Mirella Freni and Luciano Pavarotti.

Our Young Artist is Martin James Bartlett, newly signed to Warner Classics – catch him with Bernard Haitink in Mozart and with Richard Goode in a masterclass. Our Archive film travels back to 1966 for Emil Gilels in Paris, and we've another opera this month, Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito* conducted by the musician of the moment, Teodor Currentzis. Just visit medici.tv and search for 'Gramophone Selects'.

FROM WHERE I SIT

Edward Seckerson asks if the ideal Ring cycle is the one in our mind



In preparation for a public encounter with the astute and ever-enquiring Vladimir Jurowski on the subject of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* my mind goes back to the first time I saw the film of Patrice Chéreau's celebrated centenary production at Bayreuth and the realisation that truth in drama goes way beyond concepts and visual metaphors and resides in a place where an actor's face reveals what is in their soul at that particular moment in time. Chéreau's *Ring* was the first operatic film that I had seen where the unforgiving scrutiny of the camera was not an embarrassment for any of the singers in that extraordinary cast (and let's face it, the physical effort of singing is not as a rule something to be viewed in close-up) but rather a total vindication of Chéreau's probing and exhaustive work with them.

These mythical characters with their human aspirations were at last recognisable to us as much more than cyphers and caricatures, heroes and villains, and when at the close of *Götterdämmerung* Valhalla went up in flames and the Gibichung people looked quizzically out into the auditorium we were effectively looking at ourselves and contemplating all that we have seen and learned on this epic journey. Chéreau's staging was greeted with dismay and derision on its first outing because it dared to break the mould of tradition and to look long and hard at the motivation behind each and every character, to examine their motives – however primitive – and to clarify their reasons for being.

Wagner, by his own admission, was seeking to create an entirely new kind of music drama, one in which the poetic, visual, musical and dramatic arts coalesced. But there can be no drama without emotional truth, however brilliant the stagecraft, and that has been the challenge of every director who thought themselves equal to the herculean task. I remember once talking to the great Richard Jones about his notoriously controversial *Ring* for the Royal Opera in 1993 and at one point during the conversation he all but confessed that in moments of doubt he had often wondered if he should have steered clear of the piece altogether such was his distaste of so many of its characters and the compulsive need he felt to belittle them, to bring them down to size.

It has often been said that the definitive production of the *Ring* exists only in our imaginations. You might say that's the easy way out and something of a cliché – but it also explains why 'stripped-back' semi-stagings such as Opera North recently gave us and that Jurowski is currently part way through with the LPO have proved so successful and fulfilling. Because the reality is that Wagner's tetralogy is so miraculously self-contained, its words and music and the proportions of its drama so perfectly conceived that the aural experience of it can be as thrilling as any theatrical realisation.

The subliminal effect of the *Ring*'s complex network of leitmotifs means that even the untrained ear can make those all-important dramatic connections and carry the emotional memory of them forward from moment to moment, scene to scene, act to act, opera to opera. And when that 'redemption of love' motif so radiantly returns like a benediction at the end of *Götterdämmerung* it is 'closure' in the best sense of the word.

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The Milanese **MAESTRO**

Four decades with Decca, life at La Scala, Puccini, rare Verdi, and Fellini films - there's much on the menu when Neil Fisher enjoys a meal with Riccardo Chailly





Riccardo Chailly takes charge of ordering the wine. ‘This is Amarone,’ he says, as two inky-coloured glasses are placed on our table at the conductor’s favourite Milanese restaurant. ‘It’s temperamental. But, after the Verdi last night, I think it’s the right choice.’

It is lunchtime (even Chailly doesn’t quaff Amarone for breakfast, I think) but my Verdi hangover is still with me. At La Scala, where Chailly has been Music Director since the beginning of 2017, the Milanese maestro was conducting *Attila*, Verdi’s ninth opera. Although a great vehicle for some fearsome basses in operatic history (Boris Christoff, Nicolai Ghiaurov, and Samuel Ramey all had successes with the title-role, the bloodthirsty Attila the Hun), *Attila* is not considered top-drawer Verdi.

No one told this cast, chorus and conductor, however, for the performance that launched the current season at La Scala was tremendously invigorating. No, *Attila* doesn’t push the same emotional buttons as *La traviata* or *Don Carlos*, but, with Chailly the complete lynchpin of this production, there’s an eerie and almost hallucinogenic flow to the compressed (and remarkably sparsely scored) tale of the brutal despot and the Italians who conspire – after some operatic conniptions – to bring him down.

I was rehearsing in Palermo when Abbado called, asking me to conduct. I had to take the chance – but I flew to Milan with great anxiety'

Bringing *Attila* back to La Scala is all part of the plan, Chailly tells me as we sip our temperamental vino. First came *Giovanna d’Arco* (‘Joan of Arc’) in 2015, after a gap in Milan of 150 years, then came *Attila* – ‘but the arrival point will be *Macbeth* [probably in 2020], the first great masterpiece of Verdi,’ says Chailly. ‘And the two operas, *Attila* and *Macbeth*, have a connection that you cannot miss. If *Macbeth* is the masterpiece that it is, it’s because of the preparation that he’d done with *Attila*. The colouring of the orchestra, the famous *tinta*, dark and deep, even ‘muddy’ sometimes, is all there. The witches’ scene in *Macbeth* is almost a direct quote of the feast scene in the Third Act of *Attila*. It’s almost like a mirror effect, forwards and backwards between the two operas.’

Verdi had a difficult relationship with La Scala during his life, I observe. ‘More than difficult! After *Attila* was first performed in Venice, he was so unhappy about the next staging in Milan that there are letters where he says: “This theatre does not provide nor guarantee enough good stage realisations for my operas.”’ It’s a testament to how much store Verdi set by purely theatrical considerations; and to the fact that he didn’t make idle threats. After *Giovanna d’Arco*, Verdi withheld a world premiere from La Scala until *Otello*, a drought of more than 40 years.

Today, Chailly very much wants to talk rare Verdi and very much wants to talk about La Scala. Officially we’re here to talk about his 40-year association with Decca and the diverse recordings that will continue the relationship into the next decade. But there are connections to explore. Themes tend to recur in Chailly’s life and career. In 1978, Chailly embarked upon his Decca debut with Rossini’s *William Tell*, recording the composer’s grandest opera in London with an all-star cast including Luciano Pavarotti, Mirella Freni, Sherrill Milnes and Ghiaurov. It was a talisman year for him, however, because he also made his La Scala debut, and it was rare Verdi to boot: *I masnadieri*, an opera seen even less than *Attila*. ‘Claudio Abbado was Artistic Director. I was rehearsing Prokofiev’s *The Fiery Angel* in Palermo when he called me to take the first flight back to Milan – the conductor of *I masnadieri* had fallen ill and he wanted me to conduct it.’ Out of *The Fiery Angel*, into the fire. ‘I had to take the chance,’ Chailly says. ‘But I flew to Milan with great anxiety, insecurity.’

This seems strange. Milan was Chailly’s home and La Scala was practically the family business: his composer father, Luciano, had been Artistic Director there between 1968 and 1971. But Luciano didn’t offer



his son much reassurance. 'He was never a great, let's say, *consigliere* in those choices,' Chailly says, as our waiter doles out plates of delicious raw artichoke salad. 'He was very critical about my musical background. He always had the conviction – which is right, actually – that in order to enter into somebody else's compositions, a conductor should be able to compose himself. But, because I had been assisting Abbado on his symphonic seasons with the La Scala orchestra for two years, that gave me the confidence to jump in.'

Both the Decca execs and La Scala were satisfied with Chailly Jnr's efforts that year. Abbado invited him to continue his Verdian adventures in Milan with *I due Foscari* in the 1979-80 season. In 1982 Chailly got his first big orchestral job, as Chief Conductor of the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra (now the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin). It was the beginning of another adventurous journey.

In Berlin, Chailly ticked off many of the symphonic heavyweights of the repertoire but there were many off-the-beaten-track moments too. The 55-CD box-set that Decca has produced to mark the 40th anniversary includes two numbers from an album of Puccini orchestral music, the *Preludio Sinfonico* and *Capriccio Sinfonico*. 'My debut recording in Berlin!' Chailly exclaims. 'Can you imagine?' I do imagine: an orchestra of cerebral Germans appalled that their new maestro was offering them lightweight operatic offcuts. 'Not at all,' Chailly replies. 'Their attitude was the exact opposite. They'd had legendary conductors, such as Ferenc Fricsay, then Lorin Maazel, great guest conductors like Eugen Jochum. They were always interested in skipping the usual stuff, moving into new things. And they actually adored Italian music.'

As the 'other' orchestra in west Berlin, the BRSO had to carve out a niche while cohabiting in the Philharmonie



Receiving his first La Scala ovation, 1978 (top) and, almost four decades on, after *Madama Butterfly*

concert hall with Herbert von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic. So not much competition there, then. 'I had the privilege to be close to Karajan because he allowed me to attend a lot of his private rehearsals. It was one way of discovering his greatness as a sound magician, and a very special time for me.'

A hefty contribution to those 55 CDs is the complete Bruckner cycle started during Chailly's Berlin years: punchy interpretations played with plenty of imagination. How well does the conductor think those have stood up to the test of time? 'I don't know,' Chailly confesses. 'How can you be convinced that you've settled on your Bruckner cycle forever, when at least in three quarters of those symphonies you have to pick from two to four different editions – and that's in each movement. And at the time there were not so many options as there are now. You still had to choose a version, which gave me a lot of headaches. I was pleased with the

work we had delivered, but probably today I would have used different editions.' While it was Bruckner's intense aptitude for self-criticism that led to his endless rewrites, Chailly argues that the textual confusion is an opportunity, not a problem. 'It's a treasure of scores that he left – and each has great reasons to be considered. And to get out of the habit of what you know, to move into something completely different – that's my approach.'

This curiosity is really the hallmark of Chailly's career and his artistic credo. 'I actually consider conducting my "secondary" profession,' he says, as he gets to work on his main course, osso buco with the traditional Risotto alla Milanese on the side, which makes my pasta look a bit feeble. 'The first one is researching, which I adore. Studying, knowing the unknown, that gives me incredible power and adrenalin to enrich the moment of performance. And in the process of studying there is



After conducting a piano concerto by Nino Rota (Rota as soloist) in Lanciano in 1974

a lot of discovery.' Even that very first album with the Berliners of works by Puccini contained premiere recordings teased out from the archives. Later, there was a series of 'Discoveries' on Decca: Verdi, Puccini, Mendelssohn, Rossini. 'It's a privilege to know how much more there is, to broaden your knowledge.'

There were also some great totems of the repertoire that Chailly didn't want to record until he was satisfied he had discovered enough about them. Some 20 years before his thrilling Beethoven symphony cycle with the Leipzig Gewandhaus, Decca asked him to record the symphonies with the Royal Concertgebouw, just as he was starting his tenure in Amsterdam. 'I said, "I'm sorry, I'm not ready." And in fact, Wolfgang Sawallisch was chosen by EMI to do the Beethoven with the Concertgebouw.' This, as far as Chailly was concerned, was the right decision. 'He was a great maestro at the peak of his maturity and knowledge.'

'Studying, knowing the unknown, gives me incredible power and adrenalin to enrich the moment of performance'

The Gewandhaus was the orchestra that first performed Beethoven's symphonies as a cycle in the 1820s, and it had personal associations with (most of) the great icons of German musical romanticism, including Schumann, Mendelssohn and Brahms. Still, Chailly hints that the success of their Beethoven project came as much from challenging the orchestra to reinterrogate the scores as it did from harnessing the Leipzig tradition. 'There was a lot of talking with the



Intense focus: in the control room with the DSO Berlin and producer Michael Haas



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In 1991, during his time as Music Director of the Royal Concertgebouw in Amsterdam

musicians,' he says, hinting that not all the talking was entirely convivial. 'Because there were a lot of surprises.'

When Chailly was tempted to La Scala – an appointment that brought a premature end to his time at Leipzig – he made it clear that his mission was to restore the primacy of the Italian operatic tradition. Backstage at the theatre, he brought into the Music Director's office – once the lair of Claudio Abbado and Riccardo Muti – portraits of the theatre's secular saints, Verdi and Puccini. They are his preoccupations now, but he is still in the business of finding new layers in their music. His edition of *Attila* included a romance for the tenor not heard since Verdi's time. More cheekily, Chailly tells me he also added five bars written by an aged Rossini, dreamt up by the retired composer to preface the beginning of the Act 3 trio, which he had played on the piano during one of his private family parties in Paris.

And even with familiar Puccini Chailly has pushed to uncover music that was either cut or suppressed. In his *Il trittico* (out on DVD on Hardy) he included an earlier version of a monologue by Michele in *Il tabarro* ('much stronger than the one we know') and reinstated the 'poison aria' in *Suor Angelica* which, despite Puccini's pleas, had been omitted by most sopranos from early on and was subsequently removed from the definitive edition. 'It's an incredible moment – the music gets "drugged" into polytonality as she prepares the poison. It's almost Debussy-like.'

He is proud that the recent production of *Madama Butterfly*, which opened the La Scala season in December 2016 (and which has just been released on DVD by Decca), featured the original 1904 score. The premiere's infamous failure at



Continuing his family's tradition at La Scala, where he plans to perform the premiere of one of his father Luciano's works

La Scala 'was the greatest pain in Puccini's heart for all his life', says Chailly, so now amends have been made. Later this year in Milan Chailly will also give the original version of Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*, and the 2019/20 season will begin in December with a fresh look at *Tosca*, with Anna Netrebko taking the title-role. It will be another new critical edition by Ricordi, a kind of Urtext 'with almost 50 bars we have never heard'. The team at Ricordi gave the manuscript to Chailly as a present 'and it is almost unreadable, because Puccini had a neurotic way of writing. But you can see the spots which had been cut or shortened.' What fascinates Chailly about Puccini is his flair for timing, so seeing last-minute cuts or edits can reveal even more about the composer's process. 'He is so economical, so calculated, it's almost like a film, not an opera, in terms of speed, changing the mood, changing the subject, changing the atmosphere. Everything is so fast.'

After our main courses, we move on to espressos spiked with sugar. I ask Chailly if, since swapping Leipzig for Milan, he misses leading a symphonic orchestra. He gently chides me, because he is also Music Director of the Filarmonica della Scala, which, like the Vienna Philharmonic, runs independently of the opera orchestra, although its players double up. And he has been busy with them in the recording studio, too. Next comes a Fellini film music album, featuring music from Nino Rota's scores for the great Italian auteur. 'It's clearer if you call it "The Nino Rota Album",' says Chailly. 'Because Nino Rota is the genius who should be celebrated. And of course that includes his great film music, but not only that. He was a man of high culture and incredible knowledge. He was an extremely refined person, a delicate personality – a gentlemanly, stylish man.'

The Godfather composer worked with Chailly in 1974, seven years before he died, in a summer festival in Lanciano, Abruzzo. Rota had written a piano concerto for Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli, but the pianist repeatedly postponed performing it, so he played it himself and Chailly conducted a student orchestra. 'I remember the simplicity, the gentleness, the complete "anti-bullshitismo". He played magnificently well. I don't think we delivered the most glamorous performance, but he never gave any sign of irritation or impatience.'

The album will draw only on scores from Fellini films, among them the familiar *8½*. These were movies that the young Chailly would rush to see in the cinema. But he draws my attention to the suite from *Il Casanova* (1976), a dark rumination on the Venetian lothario. Rota's contribution is

'an incredible universe of sound, from semi-Baroque music with a harpsichord in the orchestra, up to almost a quotation from *The Rite of Spring*'. There is also a suite from Fellini's 'mockumentary', *The Clowns*, for which, 'because it's circus-like music, Rota reproduced the wildness. That music shouldn't be too refined or polite. You have to dare to play it the way I think it was conceived.' Can the Philharmonic loosen up enough? 'Yes, because they have been playing Rota's ballet *La strada* for many years. And the Philharmonic

recorded this Rota repertoire with total conviction, just after we finished a studio recording of Cherubini. So you can see the flexibility of this orchestra.'

Does Chailly have any unfinished business? His late father wrote 15 operas, none performed today. Chailly has considered rehabilitating one of them at La Scala, but he performs only two operas a season at the theatre and suggests it would be too difficult to fit it in. Instead, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Luciano Chailly's birth in 2020, he will conduct the belated world premiere of his father's *Sonata tritematica No 4* for orchestra. 'It was actually composed the year I was born, 1953, which is the hugest coincidence. I'm looking forward to that.'

'I want to bring to La Scala the greatest and oldest maestri, as well as the best of the younger generation'

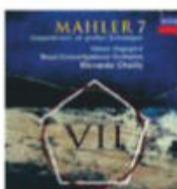
We look back at that young conductor who rescued *I masnadieri* in Milan just over 40 years ago. This season, the opera is returning to La Scala, although under a rising conductor from the next generation, Michele Mariotti. Chailly is proud that he is widening the pool of maestros at La Scala, noting that, back in the 1950s, it hosted such luminaries as Karajan, Furtwängler, Walter, Bernstein and Barbirolli. Now he wants both 'the greatest and oldest maestri, and the best of the younger generation'.

Does that mean that Chailly is happy to put his own ego to one side, so that others can have some glory too? 'Well, egoism is a big problem,' he says. 'Because it is part of all conductors. I would be stupid if I say, no, I don't have an ego. I try to temper my ego as much I can, suppress it.' He grins. 'But for a conductor that is quite a heavy task.'

Chailly's anniversary box-set is reviewed on page 94; Madama Butterfly is reviewed on page 87. His film music disc is due out on April 19 and will be reviewed in a future issue of Gramophone

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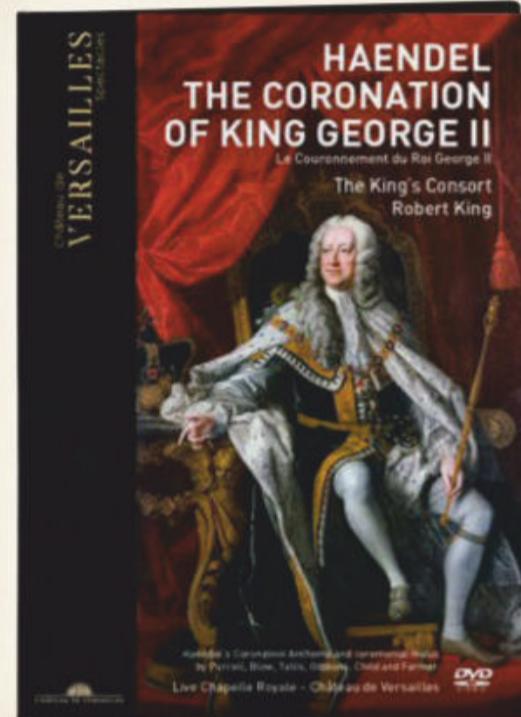
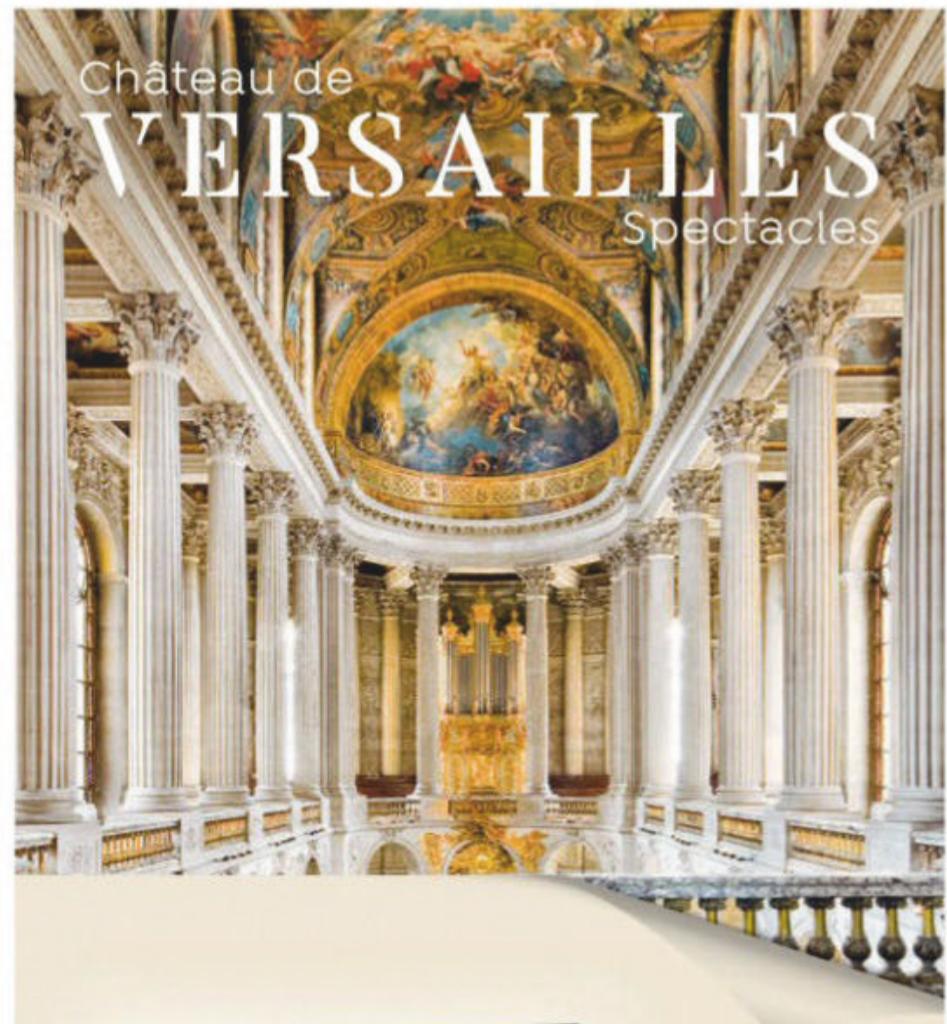


Puccini: Turandot

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Busoni, and all that jazz

From recording the world's longest piano concerto to premiering the newest, Kirill Gerstein is drawn to open-minded, explorative music-making, writes Jeremy Nicholas

As an international concert pianist, one measure of knowing that you have arrived is when a composer like Thomas Adès writes a piano concerto for you. Kirill Gerstein – Russian-born, American citizen, Berlin resident – is on a flying visit to London for another session with the composer to work on the concerto he will premiere in two months' time. We have met before – the last time was to discuss his world-premiere recording of the Urtext edition of Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto. Gerstein is convivial company; he loves to talk music, and on this occasion it's about Busoni, whose Piano Concerto is the subject of his latest recording on Myrios.

'I have always been attracted to the figure of Busoni, ever since I was a child,' he reveals. 'First, it's important not to put him in the "piano specialist" category. He is a much greater figure than that. You know there is a Russian connection? He taught in Moscow for two (apparently miserable) years. There's also the Boston

connection because, straight after Moscow, Busoni was invited to teach at the New England Conservatory in Boston.' True, but, as I remind the affable Gerstein, prior to his live recording in March 2017, the accompanying Boston Symphony Orchestra had never played the concerto in its then 136-year history. Nonetheless, Boston was the springboard for Busoni's very successful career in America. He was close to Arthur Nikisch and Karl Muck, both conductors of the Boston orchestra, and it was Muck who went on to conduct the premiere of Busoni's concerto in Berlin in 1904.

There is also a Finnish connection. 'Sakari [Oramo] feels very passionately about the work,' Gerstein enthuses, 'and besides the fact that he is the perfect choice as conductor, Busoni also taught in Helsinki. So for the Finns, Busoni is not part of the "piano specialist" club. They see him as a major foreign composer who became an adopted musical hero. And he ended up marrying a Finnish lady.'

The Busoni concerto is, on every level and in every aspect, an extraordinary creation. It is the longest piano concerto in the repertoire and, as Gerstein avers, also technically the most challenging by some distance. But – and here we both vigorously agree – it is not really a concerto. 'It is often

described as a "monster concerto", a "monumental concerto". No,' says Gerstein. 'It's a monumental symphony. In fact, in later years Busoni referred to it as his "Symphonie italienne". He stopped referring to it as a concerto. It's a sort of Italianate Mahler symphony with the world's most challenging piano part! I had a feeling when I was learning the concerto that there is not a page that comes for free. In every piece, especially if you know the style, there are pages where you can say to yourself "OK, well I know how this is made", but in the Busoni there are so many comments on Lisztian devices and so many elaborations and insider jokes where he seems to say, "OK, now your hand is used to this because you play Chopin and Liszt, but if I shift every third note to the left and every seventh note to the right, then it will be a figuration that will completely trick your existing habits."

I wouldn't say it was an accompanying part. It's more the part of a commentator. Obviously, the commentator is Busoni. That's why you need a great orchestra

and a symphonic conductor because it has to be shaped symphonically. It's not a concerto you can lead from the keyboard. With Rachmaninov's Third the piano makes the thing. In the Busoni, *everything* makes the thing.'

Some people say that the Piano Concerto is overwritten, that it is unnecessarily complicated for the effects Busoni wanted to realise. Gerstein doesn't agree. 'Ferenc Rados, a musician who was a big figure in my life and an amazing mentor, once asked me, when I was playing something, "Do you think the hippopotamus thinks he is too big?" This was a bit random. I said, "No." He asked, "Do you think he thinks he could be smaller?" Again, I said, "No." He said, "Exactly. The hippopotamus is just the size he is." So, yes, the Busoni is monstrous, it has this grandeur, but I enjoy it and it's a very beautiful musical experience. It's the kind of music Liszt would have written post-Wagner, had he lived longer. One other thing – it has this visionary quality, the illusion, the fog, the haze. Tom Adès says that Busoni is like a suitcase with a false bottom. There is always another layer.'

From starting to learn the Busoni concerto, it took Gerstein seven months on and off to be ready to give the first performance with orchestra. What was the audience response?

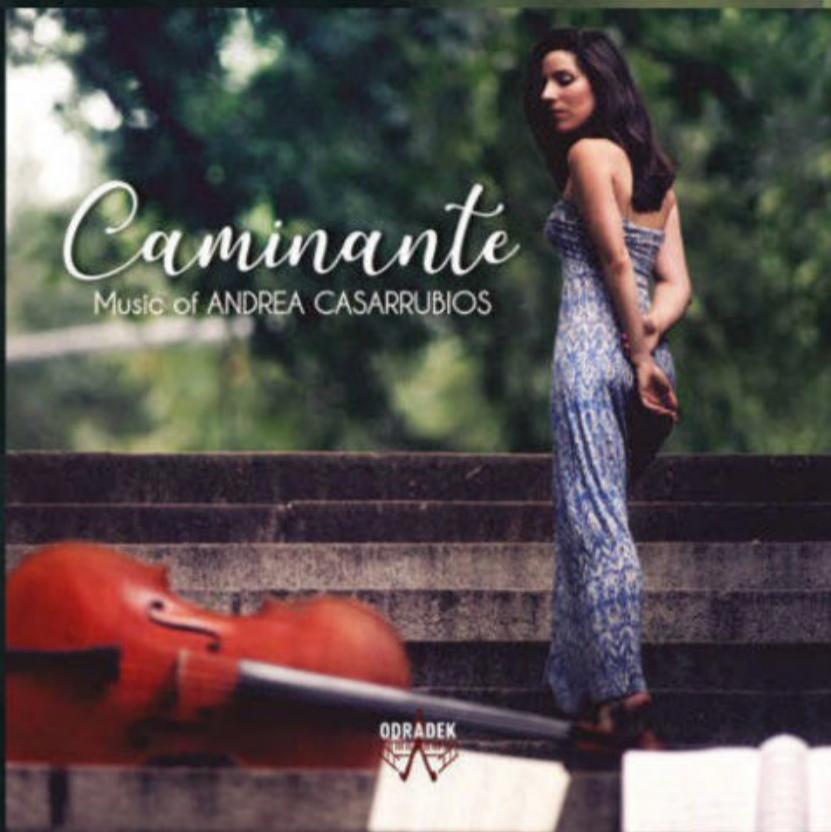
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'You need a great orchestra and a symphonic conductor because it has to be shaped symphonically': Gerstein and Sakari Oramo perform the Busoni in Boston in 2017

'Wonderful! Nobody said they would not come because it was a long concerto – we paired it with Sibelius's Third Symphony, which made sense because Busoni was a mentor to Sibelius – and the applause was long and enthusiastic. You can hear it on the recording. People knew they weren't just going to hear some piano concerto. They felt it was an event.'

I repeat to Gerstein something I found that he had said elsewhere: 'It is morally and aesthetically unacceptable to keep playing the same pieces on and on.' He laughs. 'Oh, I'm glad I said that because I believe it!' Currently, Gerstein has nearly 50 works for piano and orchestra in his active repertoire. As you would expect, they include all five Beethoven concertos (plus the Triple Concerto), the three by Tchaikovsky, and all the Brahms, Mendelssohn and Liszt concertos. But the list also contains several shorter-than-concerto pieces, such as Schoenberg's *Ode to Napoleon* and Weber's *Konzertstück*. Unusually, he enjoys pairing these in concert. For instance, he might couple Busoni's *Romanza e scherzoso* with Richard Strauss's *Burleske* or Liszt's *Totentanz* (the latter in a conflation of Busoni and Gerstein's own versions which yields an extra three minutes of music derived from an early draft of the work); he'll play Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* (in Ferde Grofé's original jazz-band version) paired with Schoenberg's Piano Concerto or *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* by Rachmaninov. Imaginative. Different. Thinking outside the box. 'I think the conventional concert format of overture, concerto, symphony is a bit boring. Not every piece these composers wrote is the length of a concerto, and to turn up and just play *Konzertstück* is a bit short, so I like to pair things as they did in concerts of yesteryear.'

This month Gerstein adds the Adès concerto to his repertoire. In 2010 he was the recipient of a Gilmore Artist Award, and he used part of the \$300,000 prize to commission works from Timo Andres, Chick Corea, Alexander Goehr, Oliver Knussen and Brad Mehldau. Did he commission Adès in the same way? 'Well, not exactly – but it's a nice story. I've known Tom for quite a while, and in 2012 I was playing his excellent piece for piano and orchestra *In Seven Days*, paired, at

Tom's suggestion, with Prokofiev First Piano Concerto. This was in Boston, and we were in this room working on *In Seven Days*. Having won the Gilmore, I said to him, 'I know I have to stand in a long line but I would like to get in line right now and hope that you will write a piece for me when my turn comes.' Now, Tom is this genius, this grand person, but at the same time he has these moments of modesty and intimacy, and he said, rather shyly, 'Does it have to be a solo piece?' And I said, 'Tom, you are the composer. It can be whatever the hell you say it's going to be.' Then he said, 'I think I'd like to write a proper piano concerto.' A few days later at Boston Symphony Hall, I was speaking to Tony Fogg, the great administrator of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and I said to him, 'Tom, over there, says he wants to write a proper piano concerto.' There followed the shortest commissioning conversation ever when Tony just said, 'OK. We're commissioning it.' And I rather naively said, 'Well, I thought I might perhaps have a European partner and I have this Gilmore money ...' And Tony kinda looked at me and said, 'Yeah. We're commissioning it.' Completed in 2018, it became the next major work Adès wrote after his opera *The Exterminating Angel*.

'I can tell you', Gerstein continues, 'and I don't think I am exaggerating – I don't think we have had such a piano concerto in the literature since Prokofiev and Ravel. I really think it's a masterpiece. It's quite concise. It does what a piano concerto should do – it has octaves, a cadenza, a slow movement of gravitas. He references these traditional models, but you never think he is doing something derivative. You never think, "This is just a pastiche, or an *hommage* or an imitation."

The premiere (on March 7) is played by the Boston Symphony Orchestra with the composer conducting. The pairing for the occasion – the concert opener – is the orchestral version of Liszt's *Mephisto Waltz* No 1. Again – different, unconventional, imaginative, and fired by this pianist's innate and insatiable curiosity. The European premiere of Adès's concerto, meanwhile, is to be performed by the Gewandhaus Orchestra in Leipzig on April 25.

Gerstein was born in 1979 in Voronezh, in the south-western region of the former Soviet Union. How, I wonder, has his Jewish ancestry informed his music-making? 'First, I did not grow up with the religion. There was no chance to do this in the Soviet Union. It's much more an ethnic, cultural thing for me than a religious one. But for Jewish people through the millennia there has been this sense of being an outsider, which can make you feel all alone. In Russia, you were not Russian – you were Jewish. It was written in the Soviet passport. I feel a connection to Russian culture, to the Russian language, but I am not "Russian" Russian. I came to America to study. I feel very comfortable in English. I feel quite comfortable within American society. But I am not American. I live in Germany, I speak German very comfortably. I teach in Germany. But I am not German. So there is that – this loneliness. But I think it gives you the chance to have an independent point of view and perhaps, sometimes, an eclectic one.'

Gerstein's father is a mathematician, his mother a musician who specialises in seeking ways to involve children in music, so Gerstein's earliest musical experiences were with her – beginning at the age of two, when he started playing the piano. Until he was 10, he was not at all sure about becoming a pianist. He was not one of those prodigies who practised relentlessly from the age of five. What he was sure about was his love of music. He also found out he could play by ear, something that, unusually, was encouraged, both by his mother and by the music school for gifted children in Voronezh where he was studying. For Gerstein, jazz and improvising are not additions to his classical training and career but merely natural components of being a musician. He has no truck with the exclusive divisions of labour in the musical world where performers perform, teachers teach and people who improvise don't play from a score, and vice versa. 'Look at people like Liszt,' he says. 'They were great improvisers. And they didn't think that because they were the greatest performers of all time they shouldn't teach. No. Teaching was simply another way to interact with musical substance.'

And speaking of great performers who are also teachers, in 1991, when Gerstein was 11, he won first prize at the International Bach Competition in Gorzów, Poland, and then attended a jazz workshop in Puławy, also in Poland. The following year an extraordinary – and maybe unique – thing happened to him at a jazz festival in St Petersburg. By chance, he acted as an interpreter for the American jazz vibraphone player Gary Burton, who was also vice president of his alma mater, the Berklee College of Music in Boston (at that time a mainly non-classical college but now merged with the Boston Conservatory). Burton asked Gerstein to send him a recording of his playing. The result was Gerstein moving to the US at 14 and becoming the youngest ever student to attend Berklee.



Gerstein is constantly reinventing himself and thinking outside the box

As his focus turned towards the classical repertoire, Gerstein furthered his studies with Solomon Mikowsky in New York, Dmitri Bashkirov in Madrid and Ferenc Rados in Budapest. He rates the Hungarian Rados (teacher of András Schiff, Zoltán Kocsis and Dezső Ránki, among others) as the mentor who altered his views on everything: 'What I feel I have been able to do is reinvent myself several times. For instance, before I went to Bashkirov (I was 20) I thought I could play the piano – albeit with a degree of self-doubt. When I got to Madrid, I said, "Wow! There is so much to do." In 2001, I won first prize in the Arthur Rubinstein competition. Then I played for Rados. Like my

first encounter with Bashkirov, it was a bloodbath. Both men had completely destroyed me. Bashkirov had said, "If you play the piano like that you should perhaps consider whether this is what you really want to concentrate on." It hurt. And then Rados (this was at Prussia Cove) – he really took it apart. That hurt. It was my ego. But in both cases, I felt, "This hurts, but the information that they have and the things they are operating with are not within my reach." I wanted to learn what these people were busy with. So at 25 I began to ask questions I'd never asked before. And if you ask an amazing mentor questions, you get great answers. So that was another reinvention. The most

important thing for me is to continue changing. I am content when something doesn't yet work musically or otherwise. I think standing in one place is the most anxiety-inducing thing.'

I am not "Russian" Russian. I am not American. I am not German. But that allows you to have an eclectic point of view'

On his last CD, a Gershwin celebration featuring the Piano Concerto and *Rhapsody in Blue*, Gerstein invited Burton to play on the only non-Gershwin-related track: an arrangement of the song 'Blame it on my youth' by the pianist Oscar Levant, friend of Gershwin and arguably his finest interpreter. 'I first heard it about the time I met Gary, in one of the versions by Keith Jarrett. I adored the tune before I knew what it was or who wrote it.' Connections. Relationships. Pairings. This is Gerstein's thing. 'Do you know it was Levant who commissioned the Schoenberg Piano Concerto? And that Gershwin paid for the recording of Schoenberg's Third String Quartet? And did you know there's this correspondence between Schoenberg and Busoni? Because he would be out of town for the official premiere of *Pierrot Lunaire*, Busoni organised a private first performance of the work to be in his apartment in Berlin.'

We're back where we began – and it's time for Gerstein to fly home. But he's still keen to talk. 'Busoni is underappreciated as the thinking centre of the current and future of music at his time. I would compare him to James Joyce in literature. He had such a command of Western music and Western culture that he could reference it.' It's hardly surprising that a musician who combines a razor-sharp intellect with music-making from the heart should have such a strong connection with Busoni. **G**

► Read Gramophone's review of Gerstein's Busoni Piano Concerto on page 37

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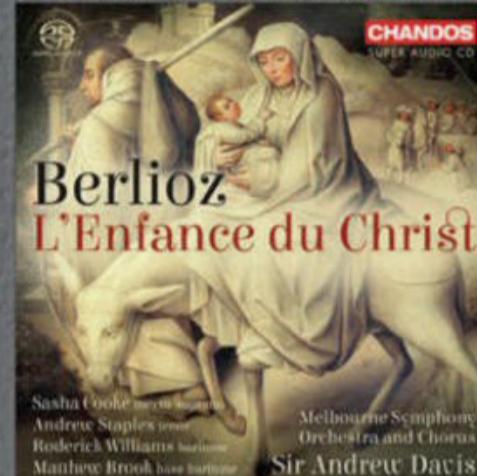
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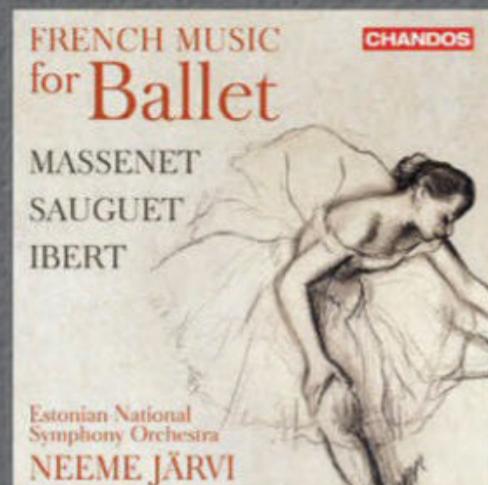


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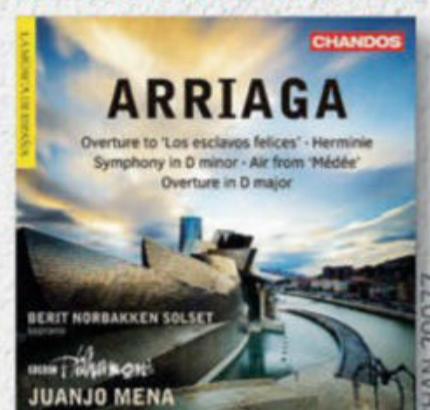


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THE POWER OF THE PASSION

Martin Cullingford visits Merton College, Oxford, to explore an important new addition to the music for Holy Week by British composer Gabriel Jackson

Were you wanting to recreate the stark desert heat of the Holy Land in Oxford, the summer of 2018 would have been a good place to start. I won't draw too many parallels between lush and leafy Christ Church Meadow and the scorched sand of the Middle East, but when Merton College Choir, soloists and players gathered to record Gabriel Jackson's ambitious *Passion* setting, it was, for Oxford at least, extraordinarily hot.

And the unexpected temperature did prove oddly suitable in terms of evoking the right atmosphere (and, for that matter, for sitting in an Oxford beer garden having a post-session pint). From the work's striking opening, where a soprano saxophone bursts out above a foreboding subterranean rumble – somehow managing to reference the sounds of the medieval shawm or even ancient shofar, yet at the same time feeling compellingly contemporary – Jackson's music transports us straight into a richly coloured, vividly crafted world.

That said, those in charge clearly (and thankfully) knew a surprising amount about temperature control when they built Merton's chapel in the late 13th century as, once enveloped in all that weighty stone, it was, surprisingly, relatively cool (although, perhaps less happily for the Fellows of the day, the early 14th century also ushered in the beginning of what's known as the Little Ice Age). Though work on building the chapel began in 1290, the college itself was founded earlier, in 1264, and it was to mark that 750th anniversary in 2014 that Jackson's 70-minute-long work – *The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ*, to give its full title – was commissioned.

In fact the anniversary celebrations were more ambitious still, the *Passion* being the central part of an entire new choir book drawing on many of the leading composers of our day – a project which, as Merton's Director of Music Benjamin Nicholas puts it, offers 'a snapshot of choral composition in 2014', a claim more than justified by the who's-who (and impressively diverse) list of leading composers who contributed works, including Harrison Birtwistle, Judith Weir, James MacMillan, Jonathan Dove and, of course, Jackson. Furthermore, as Nicholas continues, 'it also includes almost something for every bit of the liturgical year': seven composers, including Jackson, have each set one of the Advent Antiphons; there is music for Christmas and Epiphany; there are two Masses (one with organ, one unaccompanied) plus the Evening Canticles in both Latin and





Undaunted: 'If you worry about what your predecessors have done, you wouldn't do anything!' says Jackson of his approach

English; and Jackson's *Passion* sits at the heart of the music for Holy Week. Nicholas ensures that some of this music is always in the choir's repertoire, and some of it can already be heard on a number of the choir's recordings made for Delphian.

But soon to join them in the label's catalogue will be the longest work of the whole anniversary endeavour. Indeed, it's the longest work Jackson, one of Britain's leading choral composers, has himself written. A monumental undertaking – but then a Passion setting seems inseparable from the notion of a great cultural and religious monument. It depicts, after all, the events leading up to the crux, figuratively and literally, of the Christian story. And, thanks largely to Bach's masterpieces, the Passion has come to define the pinnacle of the choral repertoire. Not that this awareness felt in any way to Jackson like a weight: 'I think that, actually, if you start worrying about what your predecessors have done you wouldn't do anything!' But that an institution such as Merton should choose to mark its 750th anniversary with a new Passion is both an unsurprising and inspired choice – even more so given that the day in 1264 on which the College was founded, September 14, is Holy Cross Day.

But that's not the only link to Merton's history. Unlike, say, Bach's Passions, which use a specific Gospel text as the basis of the narrative, the brief given to Jackson here was more complicated. The events of Holy week, leading up to the Crucifixion, are indeed told through words drawn from all four Gospels. But then added to this is poetry by two writers associated with Merton – Edward Blunden, Merton Fellow and First World War poet, and TS Eliot, who was a graduate student – as well as a selection of liturgical texts, including, from the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, the General Thanksgiving prayer written by Edward Reynolds, a warden of Merton. Even the use of the King James Bible has Mertonian meaning – part of it was translated at the college.

The structure of Jackson's *Passion* is as follows. The dramatic first movement, 'Palm Sunday', opens with the choir loudly proclaiming the shocking outcome of what's to come (using here the sixth-century Latin text *Vexilla regis*), before beginning their telling of how this event came about. In this movement, as throughout, much of the narrative is given to the choir, their

references to ancient chant and a tolling bell featuring throughout this movement. 'Gethsemene', the fourth movement, takes us back to the parched earth and thorny ground – and draws upon both Blunden's First World War poetry and a quite extraordinary, chilling effect on the harp. Peter's denial and Christ's trial follow, while the Crucifixion itself is painfully sparse; that subterranean rumble and the shrieking soprano sax return, and it is bleak, frightening, hostile – as well it should be. And then, in the seventh and final movement, 'The End and the Beginning', all this pain, this loss, is gathered up, held, and turned into something consoling and hopeful, the entire movement

setting words by Eliot. Overall, it's a powerful journey, taking us through – exposing us to – not just the events, but the emotions and inherent meaning of the Passion.

The libretto was drawn together by Merton's Chaplain, the Rev Simon Jones. 'We wanted it to be a liturgical Passion,' he explains as we step outside into the Oxford sunshine and sit around the stone table in the Fellow's Garden said to have inspired CS Lewis when writing his Narnia chronicles. 'Which is why we've drawn on a variety of texts from different Gospel writers, not just one Gospel writer, and also interspersed liturgical texts. For example, for Maundy Thursday we wanted to include the Last Supper and Footwashing, so to help us to do that we included *Ave verum* [celebrating the body of Christ] and *Ubi caritas* [usually sung during the remembrance of Christ washing His disciples' feet] in the text.' Meanwhile, in the Crucifixion, the horrific narrative of Christ's execution is followed by a soprano singing the *Pange lingua* – a prayer about victory over darkness. 'There's a sense that at the moment of great desolation and God forsakenness, you then get the soprano singing about the triumph of the Cross, and that to me is a beautiful juxtaposition. We want the Gospel narrative to speak for itself, but there's a sense that, when you bring in a soloist like that, there's a commentary on it from the perspective of the church, the Resurrection community.'

As for the choice of poetry, its use underlines a key theme Jones wanted Jackson's work to embody: that the *Passion* isn't intended to be a mere record of historic events, it's meant to be universal. Its themes of sacrifice, suffering, forgiveness

words invariably set with a poignant sense of sadness, as if witnesses to an inevitable unfolding tragedy in which they are powerless to intervene. In the second movement, 'Anointing at Bethany', Jackson sets the episode of the woman anointing Christ with perfume and her tears, the story of this broken human being finding forgiveness and peace set with a heart-breaking tenderness – it's here that the General Thanksgiving from the *Book of Common Prayer* is interwoven.

Redemptive beauty gives way to the falling darkness and looming betrayal of 'Last Supper and Footwashing',

and love should resonate for everyone, everywhere: for a soldier amid the carnage of the Western Front, for a spiritual poet reflecting on faith in middle age, and for a community of students and scholars in early 21st-century Oxford. Given this, the use of the final section of Eliot's 'Little Gidding' – the last section of his *Four Quartets* – is inspired. Eliot's masterpiece explores, among many things, the idea that life and death are all part of one whole, and that, as is stated at the poem's opening, 'all time is eternally present'. 'Little Gidding' also contains the famous words of Julian of Norwich, that 'all manner of things shall be well' – not a pithy assertion that 'it'll be alright in the end', but a deep statement that everything now is, in ways we don't and can't understand, part of the working out of God's world which will, in the end, 'be well' (it's a line Jackson here sets with a touching serenity). Everything is here drawn together: themes, faith – even the musical forces, as the two soloists and entire choir are unequivocally united for the only time in the entire work, in the sort of redemptive musical conclusion that Jackson is so skilled at. It's a very moving moment.

'We didn't want to stop with the Crucifixion, but because this is a Passion we didn't want to go on to the Resurrection narrative,' explains Rev Jones. 'Incorporating that Eliot text was a way to bring the Passion and the Resurrection to the present moment – or perhaps a better way of expressing it is that, because of the Resurrection, the Passion is *now*, and is relevant to us as a community today.'

Back inside the college, meanwhile, Jackson says that Eliot's poem was 'an amazing text' to work with: 'I found it actually very easy to set because although it is quite opaque in terms of meaning, the images are so extraordinary and vivid and rich – so I was so pleased we were able to do it.'

Apart from the texts, another parameter for Jackson was the forces he was to write for. Ultimately, given that it was a commission by a choir to mark its college's anniversary, it seemed obvious that this should be a Passion for choir – in other words, that they should be the leading voice rather than singers supporting soloists, as is more common. 'And if the choir are going to have a big role, they are going to need to narrate the story,' says Jackson. 'I already knew the Merton choir, so I did think about their sound, and I did think about their personality, at least as I understand it – as I wrote the music, I could see them in the building, and I kind of heard them. The same was true of the soprano solo.' He'd asked Nicholas if he could write the part specifically for Emma Tring, a singer he knew from working with the BBC Singers.

As for the instrumental forces, as Nicholas explains, he didn't want the number of players to be 'so lavish that it would never be performed again. So it seemed to us that 10 players was practical.' Practical, then, and also allowing the greater possibility that 'other choirs who wanted to put it on could cope



The conductor Benjamin Nicholas consults Jackson during the Delphian sessions

with it'. By contrast, the week before this recording, the choir had performed Elgar's *The Apostles* with the RPO – 'and that was a very different story!' laughs Nicholas. And as Jackson adds: 'If it is a chamber choir, like Merton, then you don't want to have millions of instruments because then you're going to have balance problems.'

But one of the most intriguing and distinctive aspects of the score, something which indelibly colours its sound world, is the choice of instruments themselves – many of which seem to be drawn from the extreme ends of their respective families. 'I originally had this idea, though I couldn't work out how to see it through to its total vision, of creating an imagined, ancient sound world,' Jackson says. 'I'm not interested in what music was actually like in biblical times and what instruments there were, but I was quite interested in imagining it. In the end, I wondered how you'd do that in any meaningful sense – but what survived of that idea is this slightly unusual, extreme instrumentation. There's no flute, only piccolo or alto flute. There's a sometimes very shrieky soprano sax, there's only a bass clarinet honking away a lot of the time. The choice of instruments – these rather raucous, rather raw sounds – was a survivor from that idea of the ancient musical world,

Because, actually, you're talking about what's ultimately a pretty grim story in desert heat.' In another effective move, however, by the time we reach the powerful final movement, those extremes have been tempered, the wind instruments no longer evoking scorching sun but birdsong.

Sitting in the improvised control room, set up in the sacristy, it appears as if the chapel's acoustic is coping admirably with Jackson's sound world. The inevitable time pressures of a recording session are also being calmly dealt with, thanks to the producer and head of Delphian, Paul Baxter. There doesn't appear, however, to be any pressure of ego; it feels like a creative, collaborative process, with Nicholas, Jackson and Baxter all contributing ideas. Jackson is clearly very happy with this. While he admits that a large part of writing a piece is having an idea of how it should sound, he also says that his outlook has changed over time: 'As I've got older and more experienced, I'm more interested in what other people – Ben in this instance – wants to do with this bit or that bit. You can't control what people do, and I think the sooner you learn to just enjoy what everybody else brings to the thing, the better.'

And of course others, too, will now be able to enjoy it. Thanks to the act of recording, a work commissioned by, and performed in, a medieval Oxford college, now becomes something to be experienced by other people, in other places, at other times – which is, perhaps rather appropriately (and beautifully), reflective of the Passion story itself. 6
Gabriel Jackson's 'The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ' is released on Delphian in March and will be reviewed next month

GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Jed Distler falls under the spell of Ewa Pobłocka's glorious accounts of Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier Book 1, matching musical character with luxurious pianism



JS Bach

Das wohltemperirte Clavier, Book 1, BWV846-869

Ewa Pobłocka pf

Fryderyk Chopin Institute ® NIFCCDO62/3
(114' • DDD)

Ewa Pobłocka's name first came to my attention back in 1980, when she tied for fifth place in that year's Warsaw International Chopin Competition, and Deutsche Grammophon issued a selection of her performances from that event on a bygone LP. Since then she has pursued a steady and successful career as both soloist and chamber musician, with a sizeable discography to her credit.

Gramophone readers may be familiar with her acclaimed performance of Panufnik's Piano Concerto with the composer conducting (RCA, 5/92), and a terrific recital of Polish songs where the pianist supports the mezzo-soprano Ewa Podleś (CD Accord, 10/99). I enthusiastically endorsed a live archival 1984 recording of Chopin's E minor Concerto in these pages last April. A good number of Pobłocka's recordings, however, are either out of print or difficult to source. I hope that will not become the fate of this remarkable release.

Her Bach has everything going for it: pianistic resourcefulness, keen polyphonic acumen, impeccable taste and an ability to imbue each Prelude and Fugue with a distinct point of view borne out of musical considerations. You notice this from the start. Her C major Prelude unassumingly unfolds at a moderate pace, resonating less like a piano than a murmuring organ, while the C major Fugue sounds like a madrigal featuring four distinct yet



'Listen to the gorgeous conversational quality, as if Pobłocka's hands were a pair of chamber music partners'



JS Bach finalised Book 1 of The Well-Tempered Clavier in 1722

unified voices with prodigious breath control. By contrast, the C minor Prelude and Fugue stands out for Pobłocka's hard-hitting detached articulation. The C sharp major Prelude's arching phrases remind me of Myra Hess's similarly unpressured vintage recording, and her fluidly lyrical approach to the C sharp minor Fugue highlights the music's harmonic poignancy yet appreciably minimises its austere reputation.

Note, too, Pobłocka's swaggering D major Fugue and how each entrance of the D minor Fugue's exposition is consistently phrased, down to the slight tapering of the trill. Listen to the E flat minor Prelude and try to focus exclusively on Pobłocka's careful dynamic calibrations in the accompaniment: what understated sustaining power and legato mastery! By contrast, the F major Prelude and Fugue amounts to a masterclass in how to imbue *détaché* articulation with the utmost colour and character, not to mention trills that are impeccably precise yet never mechanical-sounding. Her E minor Fugue keeps the motoric momentum in the foreground without losing melodic direction, while her intriguing interplay of voices in the F minor Prelude retains textural distinctiveness and cogency throughout. My comments about the C major Fugue likewise apply to the F sharp minor Fugue's vocally informed trajectory.

Pobłocka uncommonly downplays the G minor Prelude's long trills (as did Alexandra Papastefanou in her recent recording – First Hand, 10/18) and emphasises the A major Fugue's dizzying cross rhythms while giving



Impeccable pianism: Ewa Pobłocka's Bach has everything going for it

an extra kick to the subject's first note for good measure. Listen to the gorgeous conversational quality in the F sharp major Prelude, as if Pobłocka's hands were a pair of chamber music partners. I've rarely heard a comparably upbeat and joyous A flat Prelude, or an A flat Fugue so organically tapered. The G sharp minor Prelude is a particularly inspired example of Pobłocka's controlled freedom and imaginative voicings. She holds interest in the long and difficult-to-sustain A minor Fugue by terracing the dynamics and incorporating myriad alternations of touch and timbre. And Pobłocka's soaring *alla breve* reading of the B minor Prelude differs from the measured tread of, say Daniel Barenboim or Edward Aldwell. Although she takes her time over the B flat minor

and B minor Fugues, Pobłocka's strong inner rhythm and subtle organisation of dynamics keep the music alive in every bar.

One can take issue with occasional tenutos that verge on mannerism (Pobłocka's phrasing of the E flat Prelude's introduction), or how she glibly trots out the F major Prelude. But such quibbles are inconsequential in face of this pianist's heartfelt musicality, enhanced by attractively full-bodied sound and a beautifully regulated Shigeru Kawai SK-EX concert grand at her disposal. Wary as I am of superlatives, I can claim without hesitation that Ewa Pobłocka's *Well-Tempered Clavier* Book 1 encompasses some of the greatest and most fulfilling Bach pianism on record. I look forward to Book 2. **G**

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue



Orchestral



Andrew Farach-Colton hears cello concertos by Gulda and Offenbach: 'In the Offenbach, where Moreau flutters in his high register, it seems possible his cello might take off and fly away' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 38**



Andrew Mellor on Paavo Järvi's complete Sibelius symphonies: 'In No 3, perhaps the finest performance here, the orchestra allows itself to be carried by Sibelius's symphonic river' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 46**

Aho

Concerto for Trumpet and Symphonic Wind Orchestra^a. Trombone Concerto^b
^aAlain De Rudder tpt^bJörgen van Rijen tbn
Antwerp Symphony Orchestra / Martyn Brabbins
BIS (F) BIS2196 (64' • DDD/DSD)



He may be best known for his cycle of (so far) 17 symphonies but Kalevi Aho, who turns 70 this month, is even more productive in other genres, having written 30 concertos to date. BIS's latest disc follows on from that of the Saxophone Concerto (12/17) and features two further such works.

Written in near proximity, the four movements of each piece follow a similar formal though subtly varied expressive trajectory. Thus the Trombone Concerto (2010) unfolds as pairs of movements – a ruminative though never discursive *Tranquillo* heading towards a cadenza that merges into an incisive *Presto* with percussion jazzily to the fore. Its eloquence more affecting through its concision, an *Adagio* then leads into the final *Vivace* whose cumulative energy is set in relief by a sudden return to the initial music for a subdued and yet hardly tranquil close.

By contrast, the Trumpet Concerto (2011) opens with a *Misterioso* shot through with ominous expectancy to which the scoring for 'symphonic wind orchestra' adds a sombre, even baleful edge; the soloist emerges through this texture before seizing the initiative in an extensive and highly sardonic *Vivace* – not least for its chorale melody. There follows a brief and restrained Intermezzo that feels almost a preparation for the *Capriccioso* into which, via a brief cadenza, it leads. This finale's vitality is at length curtailed by a return to the chorale, purged of all irony.

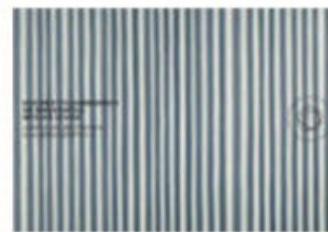
Performances, by soloists who gave the premieres, could not be bettered – the Antwerp SO forces responding with alacrity to Martyn Brabbins. Anyone new to Aho's concertos should start with those

for Horn and Theremin (11/14), but this new disc is a worthwhile follow-up.

Richard Whitehouse

Beethoven

Complete Piano Concertos
Dame Mitsuko Uchida pf
Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra / Sir Simon Rattle
Berliner Philharmoniker (M) (5) (3) + (2) (Blu-ray)
BPHR180241 (182' • DDD • 3h 23' • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.0 & PCM stereo • 0)
Recorded live at the Philharmonie, Berlin, February 4-14, 2010
Bonus interview: Mitsuko Uchida talks about Beethoven's piano concertos



Mitsuko Uchida's previous recording of the Beethoven piano concertos, with Kurt Sanderling and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra (Philips, 5/96, 4/98, 9/99), was largely a disappointment. Aside from a vibrant account of the Fourth Concerto – the only one recorded live – the rest is magisterial at best, but more often than not Uchida seems aloof. What I find striking is her overarching concern with texture and sonority, as if she were looking at Beethoven through Debussy's eyes.

I hear something similar in this cycle from Berlin where, again, Uchida takes enormous care over articulation, clarity, voicing and dynamics. And this is true in the simplest passages as well as the most virtuoso. Take, for example, the series of ascending scales in the *Largo* of the Third Concerto (at 7'40"), which she transforms into something extraordinary merely by playing them with absolute evenness – except at the very top, where she tapers ever so slightly, like oh-so-gently lifting of fingers at the end of a caress. Indeed, every one of the slow movements is breathtaking. The passage of interlocking demisemiquavers in the middle of the Second's *Adagio* – Beethoven here breaking from the Mozartian model in the most bewitchingly subtle way – is in itself a

study in texture, the piano's aerial flitting and pizzicato strings contrasted with the exquisite richness of the wind's cantilena (listen starting at 3'48").

Unlike the earlier recordings, however, there's no question that here Uchida is thoroughly engaged throughout. With Sanderling, she seemed content to co-star; this time around she seems to relish playing both protagonist and instigator, sometimes even nudging Rattle and the Berliners along. Vitality and humour abound in the outer movements of the early concertos. In the finale of the First, Uchida's bristly staccato suggests giddiness, while in the first movement of the Third, she communicates a poignant sense of inner turmoil. I do wish she was more unbuttoned in the finale of the Second. Richard Osborne, reviewing Brendel's cycle with Rattle and the VPO (Philips, 5/99), rightly described this movement as 'a dazzling game of hide-and-seek'; with Uchida and Rattle it's more an amiable game of catch. But this is a minor complaint given the riches on offer.

What's most valuable about these performances, I think, is their exploration of the music's dramatic potential. Listen, for instance, to the way Rattle takes his time at the beginning of the development section in the opening *Allegro* of the First (at 6'38"). It's as if he's opening a door to an astonishing new world. And it is a new world, after all – a dream world, in fact, where all is raptly quiet. But this entrée is only possible because the Berliners are able to make beautiful even the wispiest sliver of *pianissimo*. He does something similar in the opening of the Fourth Concerto, taking a huge, slow breath before the surprise shift to B major.

The whole of the Fourth is beautifully done, in fact. With its rich fabric of intricate figuration – particularly in the first movement – one could say that texture and sonority are among the concerto's wonders. Uchida's fastidious articulateness makes every stitch count, yet her phrasing is generous, so the detail always remains in its rightful place as part of a larger unfolding. And she doesn't merely reveal



Japanese supergroup: the Mito Chamber Orchestra and Seiji Ozawa punch above their constrained size in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony

what's beautiful; in the finale's second theme, she illuminates how beautifully strange it is, too: the sparseness of the two-voice texture after so much activity, the sensuous rightness of that 'wrong' B flat in the left hand, and the way the meandering tune ends with an abrupt query – all over a droning cello.

The performance of the *Emperor* is similarly special. The first movement's ebullience comes across vividly on the CD but is even more evident on the Blu-ray video, where one can see Rattle practically radiating euphoria. Uchida's playing, on the other hand, is far more joyous (and also wittier) than her *mater dolorosa* countenance might lead one to believe. She's mesmeric in the *Adagio*, certainly. Rattle sets the tone by shaping the strings' hushed hymn so supplely that it no longer sounds like a hymn but something more spontaneous and intimate. And Uchida phrases with disarming purity. In an interview that's part of the video presentation, she talks about the spiritual element in Beethoven's music, and how the mixed-race violinist George Bridgetower (the original dedicatee of the *Kreutzer* Sonata) described the composer's playing as 'chaste' in its expressiveness. If that's what she was aiming for here, I'd say she hits the mark.

In the finale, by contrast, she digs in with earthy boisterousness. If only the

timpani could be heard more clearly during the cadenza; otherwise the recorded sound is excellent. These are live recordings, so we hear Uchida hit a few wrong notes (but very few), as well as some extraneous noises and the occasional glitch in ensemble. Please don't let this stop you.

In the interview segment, Uchida says, too, that she absolutely never listens to her own recordings, but when Berlin asked if they could release these performances she had no choice. Yes, of course there are small flaws, she says cringing, but she also hears a vitality that made her eager to share them. I, for one, am grateful she did.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Beethoven

Symphony No 9, 'Choral', Op 125

Rie Miyake *sop* Mihoko Fujimura *mez*

Kei Fukui *ten* Markus Eiche *bar* Tokyo Opera

Singers; Mito Chamber Orchestra / Seiji Ozawa

Decca 483 4431DH (69' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at the Art Tower Mito, Mito City,

Ibaraki, Japan, October 10, 2017



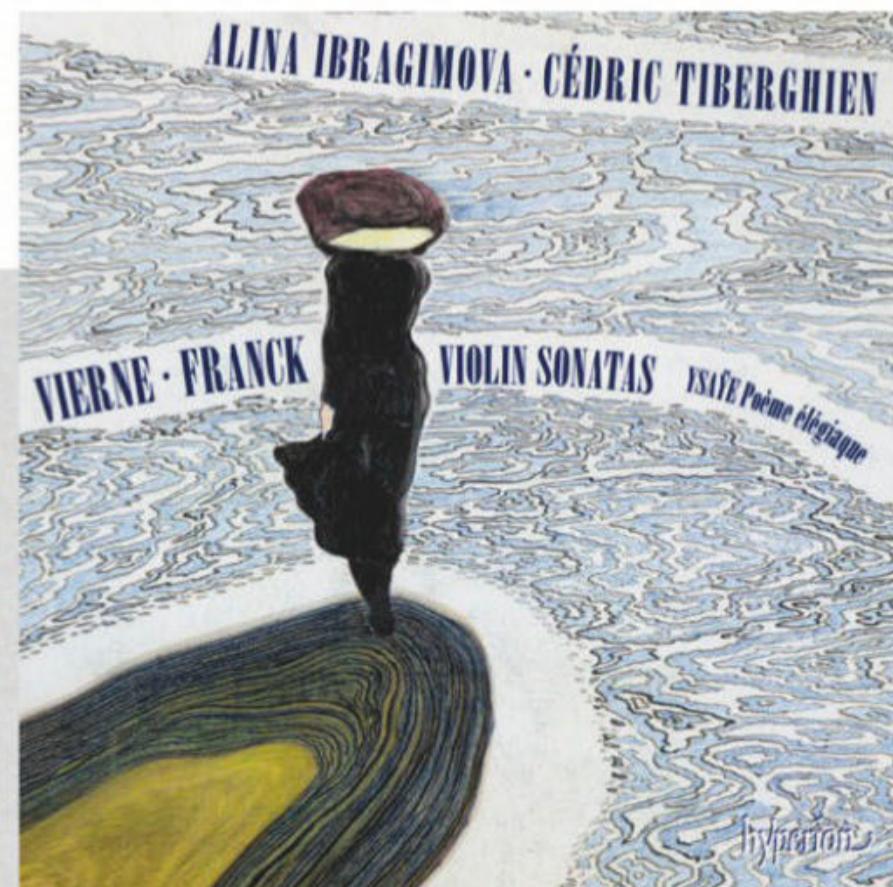
Rehearsing for ad hoc projects in the coastal city north of Tokyo that lends the

ensemble its name, the Mito Chamber Orchestra is a Japanese supergroup drawn from section principals and soloists based around the globe. To continue their Beethoven cycle after several locally released albums, plus the First (3/18), the MCO's ranks have swelled from a core of 26 to 48: still a fraction of the number involved on Ozawa's first recording with the New Philharmonia (1/75) and smaller yet than a second with his previous bespoke Japanese band, the Saito Kinen.

Timpani, winds and horns (led by ex-BPO principal Radek Baborak) cut through the texture of the Scherzo with greater impact though there's no serious loss of heft in the outer movements, not least thanks to a small but well-defined bass section. Otherwise the 82-year-old Ozawa's reading has changed little. Cast solidly in the mould of German-based interpretations of the post-war era, it enshrines pathos and distributes joy with all the ritual solemnity due to the *daiku* as a modern icon of Japanese culture.

Trombones offer flaccid support to the choral basses at 'Seid umschlungen', but the work of the Tokyo Opera Singers is a significant asset – well balanced in the mix, assured in pitch and diction, always impactful and frankly lifting the spirits after a doleful, not to say droopy account of the *Adagio*. Vocal soloists are not so well

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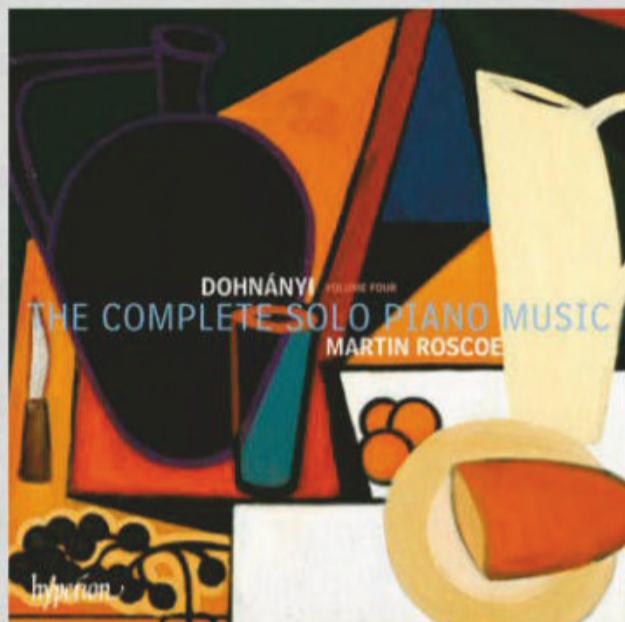
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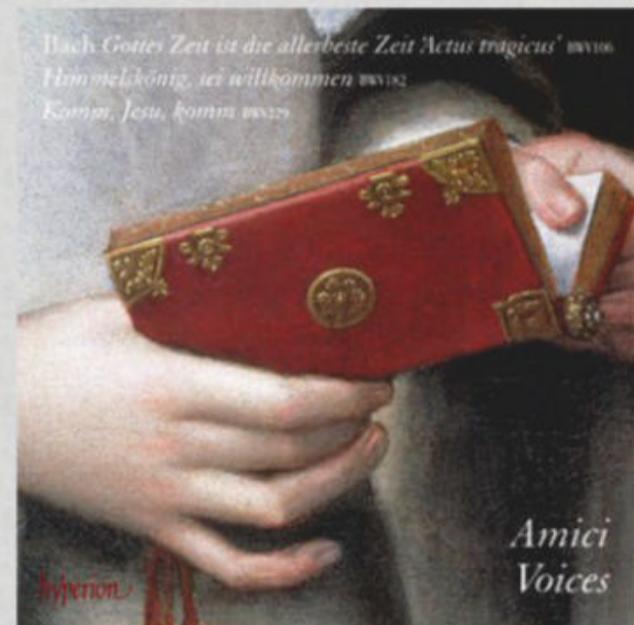
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favoured by the microphones but much better matched than Ozawa's previous quartets, and it makes a welcome change for them to be effectively led by the mezzo, who is so often drowned by her colleagues.

The end is greeted with a premature bravo and enthusiastic applause. With so many Ninths of different hues now available, however, it's difficult to see a distinctive place for this one, except on the shelves of confirmed Ozawa collectors.

Peter Quantrill

Busoni

Piano Concerto, Op 39

Kirill Gerstein *p/f*

Men of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus; Boston Symphony Orchestra / Sakari Oramo
Myrios *✉* MYR024 (71' • DDD)
Recorded live at Symphony Hall, Boston, March 10-11, 2017



Busoni's mighty Piano Concerto responds well to live recordings – just think of Donohoe and Elder at the Proms back in 1988 (EMI, 1/91 – nla). Or there's the 1966 live broadcast featuring Pietro Scarpini and Rafael Kubelík (First Hand, A/18), of which Rob Cowan thought highly, though which I've not yet managed to hear. So I had high hopes of this new account with Kirill Gerstein and the Boston SO under Sakari Oramo, caught live in March 2017, for this is my own Desert Island piano concerto.

The opening orchestral *tutti* is always a crucial indicator of a conductor's conception of the piece. Oramo keeps things moving, perhaps slightly underplaying the gravitas that Elder finds for both Donohoe and Hamelin. When the pianist takes over the dotted chordal theme from the orchestra (track 1, 3'40") Gerstein is a touch more effortful than Hamelin, though one of the pleasures of the new account is the characterful wind-playing. That said, the duetting with the oboe (9'33") doesn't quite have the ravishing finesse of Hamelin and his CBSO colleagues. Gerstein and Oramo are, though, impressive in their focus throughout the work's opening movement, and the whirl forwards towards its close has a tremendous power to it.

The second movement is marked *giocoso*, a quality that Hamelin, with his outlandish combination of fast fingers and still faster brain, conveys more easily than Gerstein, Elder alive to his every move. The effect in the new recording is less playful, though

choice will come down to your personal perception of the piece. Interestingly, Dohonoe and Elder are a touch slower here yet still vibrantly convey a playful edginess. In the Tarantella fourth movement too, Gerstein has great clarity and the finesse of the ensemble with orchestra is remarkable (especially when you consider this is live). Again, Oramo coaxes a great array of subtle colouring from the Boston SO. By comparison, Ogdon's 1967 recording now sounds a little cautious in this Tarantella, though that is down to the conductor more than the pianist, and this remains a seminal recording.

Between the two faster movements comes the epic slow movement. Both Oramo and Elder imbue it with gravitas; but whereas Elder is almost Wagnerian in the way the theme – on violas, clarinet and bassoon – emerges, Oramo gives it a more churning sense of energy. Hamelin enters with a compelling inwardness, whereas Gerstein allows himself more sense of freedom, almost seeming to be improvising at the keyboard.

But while the slow movement is the work's beating heart, the finale is the one to which all is leading, not just literally but metaphorically too, emphasising the fact that Busoni was writing not a piano concerto but a symphony with piano. Again, comparison with Hamelin is telling. He is more subtle in the accompanying arpeggios, which are better integrated into the texture than Gerstein's. But as the movement progresses, Oramo reveals subtleties in Busoni's scoring that I'd never heard before. In both recordings the moment where the men's voices creep in, singing the text by the Danish Romantic poet Adam Oehlenschläger, has the sense of arrival, coupled with sublime beauty, that is crucial, the oboe offering a poignant commentary, bewitchingly answered by flute. I always think the closing minutes of the concerto need to sound both majestic and exultant, but never showy. In this respect, Elder and Hamelin add a degree more solemnity into the mix. But, that said, this new account from Gerstein and Oramo is impressive, and anyone who loves the Busoni Concerto will want to add this to their shelves. **Harriet Smith**

Selected comparisons:

Ogdon, RPO, Revenaugh

(1/68^R, 9/00^R) (EMI/WARN) 456324-2

Hamelin, CBSO, Elder (12/99) (HYPE) CDA67143

► See our Kirill Gerstein feature on page 22

Gershwin

'Centennial Edition'

An American in Paris. Piano Concerto^a. Lullaby (orch Serebrier). Three Preludes (orch Serebrier)

^a**Leopold Godowsky III** *p/f*

Royal Scottish National Orchestra / José Serebrier

Somm Ariadne *✉* ARIADNE5003 (67' • DDD)

Recorded 1998. From Dinemec DCCD025



Originally released on the Dinemec Classics label to celebrate George Gershwin's centenary in 1998, this recording reappears on Somm 20 years later, tying in with José Serebrier's 80th birthday.

Its main points of interest concern the conductor's splendid orchestrations of the three piano Preludes. The first stands out for Serebrier's witty and unpredictable use of brass instruments and his ingeniously varied cymbal fills when the main theme recapitulates. Everyone gets a chance to poetically shine in the second, especially the clarinet, flute and muted trumpet soloists, although the double-bass soloist's execution of the second theme straddles dangerous intonational ground. Serebrier effectively expands upon the *Lullaby*'s original string incarnation as well. Note the almost Mahlerian transparency of the high woodwind ensemble against pizzicato cellos at 1'37", plus the touchingly expressive clarinet and bassoon solos.

However, the distant and diffuse recorded sound undermines the Royal Scottish National Orchestra's boisterous and characterful work in the opening section of *An American in Paris*, although the sumptuous yet forward-moving strings and virile trombones cut through the murk. Surveying the Piano Concerto discography in these pages (6/07), Jeremy Nicholas praised Serebrier's colourful orchestral framework (what idiomatic note-bending!), yet disparaged Leopold Godowsky III's espousal of the solo piano part as 'careful, cautious and, ultimately, pedestrian'. To be certain, Godowsky (a nephew of Gershwin and grandson of the famous pianist) commands the notes well, but within a limited dynamic range and without the jazzy verve and élan one usually expects in passages such as the first movement's dotted rhythms and double notes (track 5, fig 18, 6'00"). Compared with the energetic impetus of pianists like Hélène Grimaud, Pascal Rogé and Earl Wild in the central movement's *più mosso*, Godowsky just plops along (track 6, fig 3, 3'18"). Nor does his capable handling of the debonair finale come near the scorching *agitato* and tigerish ebullience that still keep Earl Wild and Arthur Fiedler (RCA) at the head of the

pack. Richard Freed's informative booklet notes are reproduced from the original CD release. Get this disc for Serebrier's orchestrations. **Jed Distler**

S Goss

Theorbo Concerto

Matthew Wadsworth theorbo **Scottish Chamber Orchestra / Benjamin Marquise Gilmore**

Deux-Elles © DKL1182 (19' • DDD)

Available to stream or download; limited-edition signed CD available from deux-elles.co.uk



Here is the giraffe-like time-travelling theorbo, in the beautiful Prelude

to Stephen Goss's hauntingly variegated concerto, startled to find itself in the midst of a modern string orchestra. The irony is that the bowed string instruments are, at least in their essentials, of greater antiquity than this Baroque oddity, whose only crime was obsolescence.

Time-travelling indeed. Following on from his superb 2015 solo theorbo work *The Miller's Tale*, also written for the lutenist and theorbo player Matthew Wadsworth, the Theorbo Concerto takes its 'principle of interwoven narratives' from David Mitchell's mind-bending novel *Cloud Atlas*, whose six connected stories are set in different times and places.

Goss, whose 2012 Guitar Concerto, written for John Williams, proved such a success with players and audiences alike, has cast his new concerto in four movements – a Baroque suite of sorts – separated by three interludes. These latter hark back to the theorbo's role as a continuo instrument, with the theorbo and double basses accompanying, respectively, a solo violin, a solo cello and a solo viola. Furthermore, a theme-and-variations runs backwards through the four main movements.

Goss has also painted a musical portrait of Wadsworth, of the theorbo and its times, and of himself. References, evocations and stylistic interventions abound, from Baroque to blues and boogie-woogie. There is even a Shostakovich waltz and a Mexican huapango. The effect is less pastiche than a coherent argument which marshals its musical elements like slightly eccentric proofs.

As always, Wadsworth finds the greatest expressive potential in the smallest element without losing sight of the whole. He has the ideal collaborators in the Scottish Chamber Orchestra under Benjamin Marquise Gilmore. **William Yeoman**

Gulda · Offenbach

Gulda Cello Concerto **Offenbach** Cello

Concerto, 'Concerto militaire'

Edgar Moreau VC

Orchestra Les Forces Majeures / Raphaël Merlin

Erato © 9029 55261-2 (74' • DDD)



Offenbach composed his *Concerto militaire* in 1847, more than a decade before the premiere of his first operetta, *Orphée aux Enfers*, to showcase his considerable prowess as a cellist. It's a sprawling score that runs close to 45 minutes, and while undeniably episodic, it wins big on charm – particularly the finale, whose gently satirical character looks forward to his music for the stage. Until recently, the concerto was only available in an incomplete version; Jérôme Pernoo and Marc Minkowski made the first recording of Jean-Christophe Keck's full, scholarly edition (DG, 4/07), revealing a far more impressive and original work than previously thought. Honestly, I'm surprised it's taken this long for a rival account to appear.

Edgar Moreau is a commanding presence, playing with a robust, singing tone that illuminates Offenbach's debt to *bel canto*. His virtuosity can be thrilling, as at 6'29" in the finale, where he flutters so rapidly in his high register it seems possible his cello might take off and fly away. Unfortunately, Moreau is let down by conductor Raphaël Merlin, who misses the rhythmic élan Minkowski brings to the score. The tubby recorded sound doesn't help, either, as it obscures too much important orchestral detail.

Gulda's concerto fares better. It's an oddball work – like Offenbach's – that mashes together rock, jazz, German folk dance, passages that seem snatched from a '60s cinematic romance, and more besides. Gulda composed it for Heinrich Schiff, and no one has matched Schiff's ferocity in a live concert from Munich in 1988 with the composer conducting (you can find it on YouTube). Moreau finds his own way, however, tracing a lyrical line from beginning to end – even in the wildest passages of the cadenza – that brings a welcome sense of integration despite the jarring stylistic shifts. The Menuett is done especially beautifully, with plenty of rhythmic point. Indeed, Merlin and Les Forces Majeures play with character and an appropriate feeling of fun. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Haydn · Mozart

'Symphonies, Vol 7 - Gli impresari'

Haydn Symphonies – No 9; No 65; No 67

Mozart Thamos, König in Ägypten, K345 – excs

Basel Chamber Orchestra / Giovanni Antonini

Alpha © ALPHA680 (73' • DDD)



The seventh volume of Giovanni Antonini's projected Haydn symphony cycle

turns to works with theatrical connections. Poor old Symphony No 67 is rarely heard outside other cycles; its music, according to Christian Moritz-Bauer's notes, is assembled from some 1772 incidental music for the play *Die Jagdlust Heinrich des Vierten* – the same hunt that informed Méhul's overture *La chasse du jeune Henri*, long ago a Beecham favourite. Hunting calls are there in the quiet opening, and effects such as *col legno* enliven the slow movement.

A comparison with the Academy of Ancient Music under Christopher Hogwood (Decca, 9/99, 11/16) shows how far the period-instrument movement has come in a quarter of a century. The same goes for the better-known No 65, whose associated theatre piece is newly identified in the booklet as the 1769 'lustspiel' *Der Postzug, oder Die noblen Passionen*. If Hogwood (4/92) captures better the manic energy of the faster music, the Basel CO demonstrate how pinpoint precision and a depth of understanding, borne of performing and touring this music before recording it, pays dividends. Hogwood's players, on the other hand, are uncharacteristically shonky here.

Symphony No 9 perhaps prefaced a secular cantata rather than a play. It's a three-movement piece, closing with a minuet, which is played in a more stately fashion by Benjamin Spillner and his Heidelbergers (Hänssler, 2/19 – and I never imagined I'd be reviewing two recordings of Haydn's Ninth Symphony in successive months!). Antonini is uniformly faster in minuets but eschews Spillner's harpsichord accompaniment, making this a viable period-instrument alternative. The disc is filled out with a selection of Mozart's incidental music for *Thamos, König in Ägypten*, which occupied him repeatedly during the 1770s. It's more presently recorded than the English Baroque Soloists and John Eliot Gardiner – who devote a whole disc to its various versions, complete with choruses (Archiv, 2/94) – vividly capturing the greasepaint whiff of this richly dramatic music.



Don Juan meets Peer Gynt: Armas Järnefelt's score for the 1919 film *Song of the Scarlet Flower* has been revived by Jaakko Kuusisto

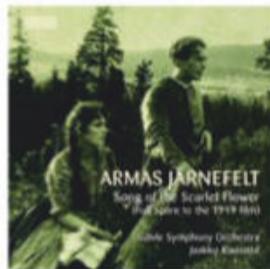
At last Haydn's symphonies are receiving single-minded attention from performers able to give them the time and attention they deserve, with the rewards being audible in playing of the highest accuracy and imagination. Which way will Antonini turn next? **David Threasher**

Järnefelt

Song of the Scarlet Flower

Gävle Symphony Orchestra / Jaakko Kuusisto

Ondine  ② ODE1328-2D (100' • DDD)



Mauritz Stiller is credited with discovering Greta Garbo but before he went to Hollywood he directed the first Swedish blockbuster, *Song of the Scarlet Flower* (*Sängen om den eldröda blomman*). Stiller had emigrated to Sweden from Finland to avoid conscription into the Russian army, which might explain why he chose a Finnish novel (by Johannes Linnankoski) on which to base his 1919 film and the Finnish composer Armas Järnefelt, then working in Sweden, to score it. Järnefelt's

work is said to be the first full-length original movie score written in the Nordic countries.

The story is Don Juan meets Peer Gynt: the dashing young Oluf woos countless women, sets off on adventures and eventually finds himself confronting his first love, now a desperate prostitute who kills herself shortly after the encounter. That proves an awakening. Oluf returns home to find his parents dead, and successfully persuades Kyllikki – another conquest whose guardians long disapproved of Oluf, though she promised to wait for him – to be his wife.

Järnefelt struggled with the new discipline of cutting his music to fit the picture but, ever the pragmatist, enjoyed the process and was happy with the result. Though one or two excerpts made it into the Nordic concert repertory (the music that accompanies Oluf shooting the rapids and the fight over Kyllikki, both highlights), the full score was lost until the 1980s and is heard in something near its original form in this completion, faithful to the original orchestration, by Jani Kyllonen and Jaakko Kuusisto.

The music is rooted in National Romanticism with flashes of technical

brilliance, a good narrative arc, the occasional Wagnerian reference (including loose application of a leitmotif technique) and some dramatic masterstrokes that proved Stiller chose the right man. Accordion, piano and harmonium add atmosphere at strategic points and there are numerous evocative solos, all beautifully played by members of a perky, reactive and highly engaged Gävle Symphony Orchestra. The score is not as biting as you might think; Järnefelt has ways of enlivening and energising what could be an endless string of folk dances in the film's first hour. The music he writes to pit the sinful city against the innocent country – the orchestra ticking quietly with threat and tension, peppered with flashes of suspicious sophistication – is of particular interest and the ending, with a rousing homecoming hymn, would have melted even the most stoic Lutheran heart. **Andrew Mellor**

Mahler

Symphony No 2, 'Resurrection'

Ruby Hughes sop Sasha Cooke mez Minnesota

Chorale; Minnesota Orchestra / Osmo Vänskä

BIS  BIS2296 (85' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



Reviewing Vänskä's recording of Mahler's Sixth Symphony (6/18) I once again raised the issue of subjectivity and objectivity in this music, suggesting that conductors (like Vänskä) whose inclination was to step back from it were in danger of missing the point entirely. It is, and always will be, far too personal merely to observe and scrutinise – to fully understand it you need to inhabit it.

Consider the weight of expectation that arrives with the opening pages of the Second Symphony: the nerve-racking tremolando in the strings (where the spectre of the storm prelude to Wagner's *Die Walküre* looms large); the ferocious interjections from lower strings; the imminent arrival of a march-like strain in the winds. With Vänskä our attention is entirely focused on the notes: the precisely foreshortened tremolando (which can be a cliffhanger depending upon how the conductor interprets the value of those opening bars), the clipped response to the cello and bass flourishes. Incisive, yes; dramatic, no. Entirely cosmetic, it would seem – an appreciation of the notes but not the reasons for them. Where is the weight of expectation, the heft, the daring behind these opening gestures? The 'shock of the new' is a phrase that might have been coined for this movement.

There are other indications which point to how deeply un-Mahlerian Vänskä's performance is. The portamento 'sighs' which mark the wind-down into the tentative reappearance of the second subject sound almost embarrassed to be there – like they are written and therefore must be observed without quite knowing why. At least that second subject brings with it a bit of magic – the kind of hush that spells solitude in Vänskä's Sibelius. Suddenly he and his Minnesota Orchestra sound thoroughly engaged.

But mostly we – and Mahler – are short-changed. Where is the shock and awe of the great development climax of this first movement? Why (and this is a common oversight) is the *molto pesante* at the arrival of those horribly dissonant chords – poised to batter us into submission – virtually ignored? If you are a Bernstein you understand the shock tactic of arriving on the first of these chords as if jamming on the brakes of a juggernaut. No ritardando into them or after (which is Vänskä's compromise). It's hard to pull off – Mahler's awkwardnesses are part and parcel

of his innovative nature – but get it right and it's like a fissure opening up in the fabric of the symphony.

For the rest, Vänskä's second movement is deftly, elegantly served – though I don't feel the connection with the first movement. The third-movement Scherzo doesn't sound like Mahler at all, the sentimental Trio with its close harmony trumpets too hurried and in-tempo to convey that rosy (slightly cheesy) nostalgia.

The soft maternal tones of Sasha Cooke (a lighter mezzo sound than we are accustomed to) bring a quiet determination and hope to the 'Urlicht' and the special effects of the finale's 'Judgement Day' evocation are expertly stage-managed (excellent job, the BIS engineers), hitting all its marks without ever, for my money, inspiring awe. The import and substance of the big moments just isn't there.

The great choral peroration never fails to thrill, of course, but you don't feel the accumulative elation and release conveyed by a conductor like Vladimir Jurowski (a live LPO recording full of revelations, big and small – 8/11) or the fervent 'rightness' of Bernstein, whose LSO recording (though technically wanting – Sony, 11/74) takes the Mahlerian theatrics to an almost cosmic level. That isn't in Vänskä's nature or his gift.

Edward Seckerson

Mendelssohn

Concerto for Violin and String Orchestra.

String Symphonies Nos 1-6

Munich Radio Orchestra / Henry Raudales vn

BR-Klassik F 900324 (74' • DDD)



Mendelssohn never intended for his 12 string symphonies to be published.

Composed from around 1821, when he was just on the cusp of his teens, these concise and buoyant three-movement works (probably initially modelled on CPE Bach's symphonies) were for him essentially symphonic études, and collated as such in a carefully dated exercise book reserved for their purpose. So it would be interesting to know what he would have felt about their now having a public life after his exercise book was unearthed in 1950. Likewise his early Violin Concerto in D minor, composed around the same period for his violin teacher and close friend Eduard Rietz, which again was a discarded work until it was revived in the 20th century by Yehudi Menuhin.

The reason I mention all this is because in my view these works do demand an extra sprinkle of musicianly fairy dust to lift them into the realm of music worthy of our ears beyond their interest as historical documents. So it's hats off to the Münchner Rundfunkorchester and their concertmaster Henry Raudales for giving us some of that here with their programme-opening D minor Violin Concerto. This opens bright of tone and light of weight, with a crisp, neatly delineated and urgently scurrying first statement from the orchestra complemented by neat, lithe elegance from Raudales himself. It's their final *Allegro* I like most of all, though, because this is unashamedly good fun: effervescent and technically perfect little cadenza spots from Raudales which showcase the thoroughly Mendelssohnian upper-register delicacy and gossamer textures, cheekily supported by an orchestra right on the nanosecond of their every sudden start and stop.

The readings of the first six string symphonies which follow have a similar *en pointe* freshness to them. However, with these I can't help leaning more towards the very first recording made of them, back in 1971 by Kurt Masur with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra (DG, 10/72 – available to download or stream), for the slight extra bit of weight and pep they carry. That's not to say that the symphonies don't have their racy moments with these Munich musicians, though, and indeed some might actually prefer their slightly lighter touch. **Charlotte Gardner**

Mussorgsky · Tchaikovsky

Mussorgsky Pictures at an Exhibition

(orch Ravel)^a **Tchaikovsky Symphony No 4**,

Op 36^b

London Symphony Orchestra /

Gianandrea Noseda

LSO Live M LSO0810 (74' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at the Barbican, London,

^bOctober & November 2017, ^aJune 2018



You would surely expect an Italian to tap into the heat and ardour of

Tchaikovsky's fate-fuelled Fourth Symphony – but 'heavy and unyielding' is all that I took away from Noseda's decidedly unremarkable performance. A sternness prevails – fair enough, you might say, with Fate holding all the cards – and yet what a feeble impression the opening horn summons makes. It's almost as if Noseda has caught his players off-



Santtu-Matias Rouvali directs the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra in a gripping account of Sibelius's First Symphony – see review on page 43

guard. You want them to have another crack at it.

This first movement is the weighty foundation of the entire piece, for sure, but without impulse it is diminished. Noseda's reading seems almost wilfully to eschew movement and flexibility in favour of a rigidly monolithic approach – even the folksy woodwind-flecked second subject group feels foursquare, lacking the wistful charm that its wintry melancholy should invoke. The imperative of the movement – not least in the feverish approach to the development climax – is nowhere. Compelling it is not. There is an eleventh-hour sprint into the coda (which comes as a bit of a surprise); and while the huge violin tremolando restatement of the first subject never fails to thrill, it doesn't feel like a release here, and certainly not the culmination of all that has preceded it.

And that failure to deliver in the first movement has a fatal knock-on effect on the rest, with the songful oboe-led *Andantino* of the second movement leaving me emotionally disengaged in a way that I can't remember feeling in a long while. The remaining movements are efficiently if unremarkably dispatched; but again, flooring the accelerator pedal

into the final pages of the finale doesn't feel organic to me but rather a late and slightly self-conscious attempt to bring the house down. Not, then, a performance to revisit in a catalogue over-stocked with temperament and excitement. I am reaching for Mravinsky as I write this.

The Ravel-orchestrated *Pictures at an Exhibition* fares better. Characterisation is sound (though 'Gnomus' feels more than a touch overworked) and the spectre of Mussorgsky is always omnipresent – particularly 'Bydło', in which the LSO's principal tuba Daniel Trodden nobly conveys the poetry of a venerable Russian woodcut. Not surprisingly, there is further distinction from the LSO elsewhere – Simon Haram's alto sax troubadour beneath the ramparts of 'The Old Castle' and the entire woodwind choir, whose animated 'Unhatched Chicks' is like the GIF that keeps on giving. I also like the way Noseda has of making the characterisation of individual pictures bleed into the Promenades – a feature of the piece that Ravel really runs with and enriches through his creative imagination.

A disc of two halves, then, but still not one to get excited about. **Edward Seckerson**

Rachmaninov

Symphony No 2, Op 27.

The Isle of the Dead, Op 29

Castille and León Symphony Orchestra /

Andrew Gourlay

Orquesta Sinfónica de Castilla y León

© OSCYLO01 (75' • DDD)



British audiences may best remember Jamaican-born Andrew Gourlay as assistant

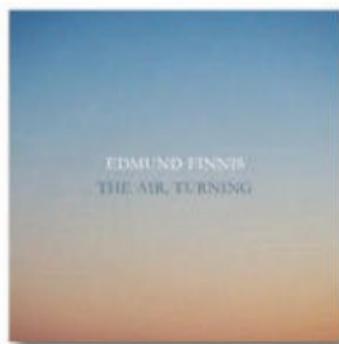
to Mark Elder at the Hallé or for his conducting of Graham Vick's Birmingham Opera Company revival of Tippett's *The Ice Break* in 2015. Always peripatetic, his Spanish connections date back to his victory at the 2010 Cadaqués International Conducting Competition. After three years as music director of Valladolid's Orquesta Sinfónica de Castilla y León, he has decided to eschew niche repertoire and go for broke with this splendidly alert inaugural release on the orchestra's own label. We have travelled a long way since uncut orchestral Rachmaninov was considered box-office poison.

As much out of left field as 2001's Rachmaninov Second from José Cura,

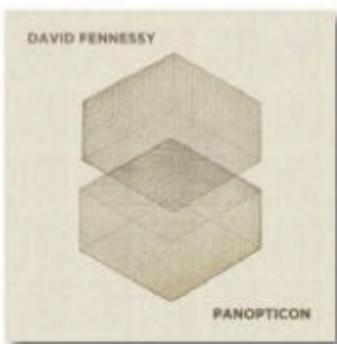


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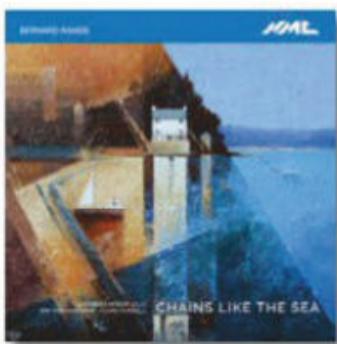
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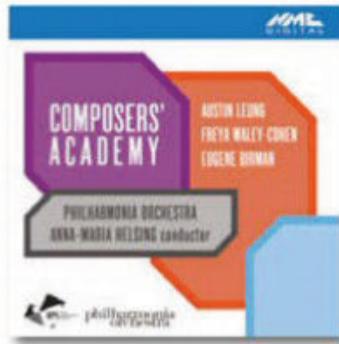
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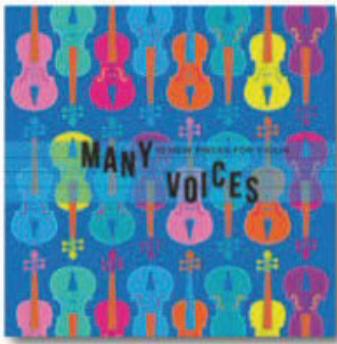
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London Symphony Orchestra

this one proves a comparable success. Gourlay's occasional tendency to linger over transitions does not preclude the sharp characterisation of detail nor the kinetic build-up of climaxes. That said, the omission of the first-movement exposition repeat (observed by Cura though not by the older hands cited below) may worry some. The free-flowing *Adagio* is moulded less than subtly at times, its famous clarinet solo artless rather than velvety or maximally emotive. Still, the extrovert approach has its attractions and the finale does not outstay its welcome. At the very least the performance fulfils the conductor's aim 'to allow our orchestra to shine, and show the level at which we play'. Sound and continuity are in the safe hands of producer Andrew Keener and engineer Dave Rowell, who position us quite near the stage in what seems to be a sonically top-notch hall. If the winds are a little pale, with closely observed violins more memorable for their incisive articulation than their generous warmth of sonority, that is doubtless a reflection of the band's own characteristics.

Generously paving the way for the main work in physical format, *The Isle of the Dead* is sharply etched, more brightly lit than the black-and-white reproduction which inspired its composition. One of the several variants of Arnold Böcklin's painting is reproduced in the accompanying booklet, a surprisingly sumptuous bilingual affair in full colour. **David Gutman**

Symphony No 2 – selected comparisons:

LSO, Previn (4/73^R) (EMI) 085289-2

RCO, Ashkenazy (7/82^R, 7/96) (DECC)

448 116-2DF2 or 455 798-2DC3

Sinfonia Varsovia, Cura (2/03) (AVIE) AV0022

Schubert

Symphonies – No 3, D200; No 5, D485;

No 8, 'Unfinished', D759

City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra /

Edward Gardner

Chandos (F) CHSA5234 (74' • DDD/DSD)



Edward Gardner and the orchestra of which he was formerly principal guest conductor move backwards through the 19th century, from Mendelssohn (2/14, 10/14, 4/15) to Schubert. Handily, this selection of symphonies fills in the gaps in the round-up of recent Schubert discs in the last issue of *Gramophone* with Nos 3 and 5; only No 8, the *Unfinished*, was included in that selection.

The two earlier symphonies here display the same hallmarks as their near

neighbours, combining the design and drive of early Beethoven with the terseness of Haydn and a melodic style distilled from Mozartian lyricism and Rossinian whimsy. They can too easily sound routine if not played with the care for structure and phrasing that is characteristic of Gardner's approach. The orchestra, too, are on fine form, with the woodwind especially making the most of their contributions, not least the clarinets, so integral to the sound world of the Third. Speeds never drag, with some pinpoint string work in finales; perhaps only the slow movement of the Fifth lacks a little in breadth and repose, but it is shaped so acutely that one doesn't mind in the slightest.

The advance from the early symphonies – the Sixth was completed shortly after Schubert turned 21 – to their successor, the *Unfinished*, is made all the more breathtaking when they are placed in juxtaposition, as here. The microphones seem to have been moved out to accommodate the larger orchestra, complete with three trombones; and, following the louring cello-and-bass introduction, the ensuing unison oboe-and-clarinet melody blows in like a solar wind; the voice is now uniquely Schubert's. Once again, Gardner doesn't linger unduly (there is, after all, the practical matter of fitting three symphonies on a single disc). The same beauty of playing is present, and the sense of catharsis at the close of this miraculous two-movement torso is palpable. A worthwhile opening gambit in a cycle that will undoubtedly be worth following. **David Thresher**

Schubert

'Abbado Rediscovered'

Symphonies – No 5, D485;

No 8, 'Unfinished', D759

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Claudio Abbado

DG (F) 483 5620GH (55' • ADD)

Recorded live at the Musikverein, Vienna,

May 31, 1971



How Schubert's Fifth is played (and heard) in concert depends heavily on where it's placed (Sibelius's Seventh is another symphony that shuttles between halves). Wolfgang Stähr's contextual note helpfully explains that the Fifth ended this concert from Whit Monday of 1971. It's a second-half sort of performance, strongly marked, observing all repeats, wrapped in Viennese

legato and finished off with a dash of gentility like cream in the coffee.

By contrast, a sense of valediction is encoded within the DNA of the *Unfinished* Symphony (played first on the night, with Pollini in Bartók's Second Concerto the missing centrepiece). While Mario Venzago and Stefan Gottfried have recently presented compelling counterfactuals of a finished *Unfinished*, the fact of the matter is and always will be that Schubert broke off composition after the first 12 bars of the Scherzo, leaving a B minor torso and not a fully rounded B flat major entity. We have what we have.

Listening to Abbado's *Gramophone* Award-winning account with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe (2/89), and then to this concert performance from almost 20 years earlier, only serves to reinforce the rule that, once established, a musician's vision of a work rarely undergoes radical transformation. Indeed, the conductor's belated shift to 'period' Beethoven and Mozart proved something of an exception to that rule.

The opening of the *Unfinished* (against the backdrop of the Viennese noisily settling themselves into their seats) unfolds imposingly but without minatory intent, and is closed by a long fermata, as if to compress the material of a Haydn-esque symphonic introduction within a single phrase. A kind of Brucknerian long game is played thereafter, for which the template would appear to be Karajan's Salzburg Festival performance with the orchestra of 1968 (reissued by DG in 1995): no first-movement repeat and a reliance on the VPO's principal oboe to sustain the movement's principal theme at a tempo defying both credulity and breath control.

The *Andante* is thus nudged towards an *Adagio*, without (quite) turning the walking bass into a dirge. Perhaps only with his very last appearances on the podium, at the 2013 Lucerne Festival, did Abbado find the kind of line he was looking for in this music.

Peter Quantrill

Sibelius

Symphony No 1, Op 39. En saga, Op 9

Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra /

Santtu-Matias Rouvali

Alpha (F) ALPHA440 (59' • DDD)



This is one terrific disc. For anyone who has ever mistakenly regarded the First Symphony as the romantic, Tchaikovsky-infused precursor to a more

elusive, challenging, fully formed Sibelius, the young and exciting Finn Santtu-Matias Rouvali is out to disavow you. The piece you thought you knew well is suddenly so unexpected. Even the course of that desolate clarinet solo at the outset is unsettled by the significance Rouvali places on the tiny crescendo in the timpani partway through this remote plaint. A distant thunder in a bleak landscape.

Everything about this performance is clearly, startlingly defined. A penetrating ear is held to the score so that things like the approach to the development climax with woodwinds eerily swirling across each page are thrown into such sharp relief as to uncover strange and exciting dimensions to the harmony. Rarely were the bass lines so dramatically delineated. This music comes up through the bass lines. The shift of chords in the final bars of this first movement pre-echo the conclusion of the Seventh Symphony, the dying pizzicato with barely the strength to speak.

The Gothenberg Symphony have rarely sounded more committed, the string-playing possessed of tremendous conviction in the opening pages of the second movement. I also wonder if the Trio of the Scherzo has ever sounded more obliquely mysterious given the robust certainty of what frames it. Then the intrigue of the finale's opening paragraph and the arrival of that big tune replete with longing. Its return in the wake of the tempest-tossed main *Allegro* (fizzing with excitement) is as resplendent as it is expansive.

So I doubt there's a more gripping account of the symphony currently to be found – and it comes in tandem with an equally impressive reading of the 19-minute epic that is *En saga*. Its folkloric primitivism has therapeutic implications: the composer thought it revealed more of his inner self than anything he had written and Rouvali does indeed project its shifting narrative (its stream of consciousness, if you like) with an almost hallucinogenic vividness. States of mind indeed.

There is also, it should be noted, a satisfying symmetry to the coupling, the disc beginning and ending with an elusively poetic clarinet solo. Urban Claesson take a bow. **Edward Seckerson**

R Strauss

Horn Concerto No 1, Op 11^a. *Metamorphosen*, Op 142^b. Serenade, Op 7^b. Sonatina No 1, 'Aus der Werkstatt eines Invaliden', Op 135^b

^aRobert Langbein hn

Dresden Staatskapelle / Christian Thielemann

Profil ② PH15016 (86' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Semperoper, Dresden,

^bMay 15, ^aNovember 23, 2014



Christian Thielemann and the Dresden Staatskapelle give us

early and late Strauss in this beautifully programmed set, recorded during concerts marking the 150th anniversary of the composer's birth in 2014, and released to commemorate the 70th anniversary of his death, which falls this year. The set also celebrates Strauss's long association with Dresden itself and at its centre are two works for wind ensemble, premiered decades apart, by musicians of the city's Tonkünstlerverein: the E flat Serenade of 1881, which launched Strauss's career after it was taken up by Hans von Bülow; and the Sonatina in F, written in 1943 while Strauss was convalescing from repeated bouts of influenza, whence the title *From an Invalid's Workshop*.

Neither is quite a masterpiece, though the Mozartian Serenade is a work of great beauty and charm, striking in its melodic surety. The Sonatina blends wit with nostalgia – Norman Del Mar detects within it allusions to the *Burleske* of 1885/86 and the 1900 opera *Feuersnot* – but suffers from occasional prolixity, particularly in the finale, where Strauss's leisurely treatment of his thematic material can turn discursive. Thielemann can't quite disguise the flaw, though he judiciously avoids hurtling through the enormous final coda, marked *Presto* in the score, focusing instead on tying up the threads of the somewhat lengthy musical argument. The opening movement is deftly done, the central Romance and Minuet at once elegant and deeply felt. The Serenade, meanwhile, sounds exquisite. The playing in both works is exemplary.

Particularly striking in the Sonatina are the long-breathed horn solos, beautifully done by the Staatskapelle's principal Robert Langbein, who also gives the performance of the demanding First Horn Concerto, with which the set opens. Written in 1883 for the Dresden-based virtuoso Oscar Franz, it reveals the influence of Schumann in its cyclic form, while the *Andante*'s principal theme strikingly prefigures Ariadne's 'Ein Schönes war'. Langbein's lyricism and panache suit the work down to the ground, while Thielemann's conducting is admirably taut yet supple. It's a superb performance.

The set closes, meanwhile, with *Metamorphosen*. Thielemann adopts spacious tempos throughout; placed beside Rudolf Kempe's 1973 recording (EMI/Warner, 12/92), also with the Dresden Staatskapelle, the opening phrases seem unduly slow and comparatively detached, though the performance gradually gains in power and momentum as it goes, and its cumulative impact is considerable. The playing is impeccable, both in its richness and detail. The recordings, meanwhile, are superbly engineered, though you can hear occasional platform movement and some key clatter in the wind ensemble works. **Tim Ashley**

Vaughan Williams

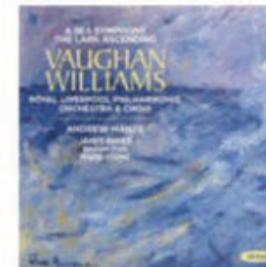
A Sea Symphony (Symphony No 1)^a.

The Lark Ascending^b

^aSarah Fox sop ^aMark Stone bar ^bJames Ehnes vn

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic ^aChoir and Orchestra / Andrew Manze

Onyx ⑤ ONYX4185 (78' • DDD • T)



Goodness, how spoilt for choice we are becoming in this repertoire! The

fourth instalment in Andrew Manze's Vaughan Williams symphony cycle couples a delectably articulate performance of *The Lark Ascending* (featuring James Ehnes at his customarily unruffled best) with a watchful, impressively agile account of the mighty *Sea Symphony*. Manze directs with scrupulous sensitivity and a shrewd ear for detail (in the Scherzo especially you hear more of RVW's brilliant string-writing than you would have ever thought possible), has an experienced and intelligent pair of vocal soloists, and secures some finely drilled and conspicuously eager results from his highly accomplished RLPO forces. The recording, too, has both pleasing focus and analytical clarity to commend it, even if a fraction greater ambient glow might not have gone amiss.

So why, even after a number of hearings, do I continue to harbour tiny doubts? Well, returning to Martyn Brabbins's rather more expansive BBC SO version (Hyperion, 10/18), I find it has an extra elemental charge, exploratory zeal, richness of sonority, majestic sweep and frequently jaw-dropping sense of spectacle that thrill to the marrow every time. Manze's finale in particular never quite plumbs the



TO THE END OF THE UNIVERSE

For the press, it was a "triumph": the performance of all Ludwig van Beethoven's piano concertos with Mitsuko Uchida, Simon Rattle and the Berliner Philharmoniker. With vibrant freshness, the performances brought the whole combative energy of these works to life. At the same time, Beethoven's incomparable spirituality was revealed here, which – according to Mitsuko Uchida – "allows us to see to the end of the universe". Audio and video recordings of the cycle are now available in an exclusive edition.

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GRAMOPHONE Focus

SUMPTUOUS SIBELIUS

Andrew Mellor listens to a Sibelius cycle from Paavo Järvi, recorded live in Paris, and finds himself wishing for a touch more Nordic ice



Lustrous and characterful: Paavo Järvi gets a thrilling sound from the Orchestre de Paris in Sibelius

Sibelius

Complete Symphonies

Orchestre de Paris / Paavo Järvi

RCA Red Seal ③ 19075 92451-2 (3h 52' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Salle Pleyel and the Philharmonie, Paris, 2012-16



This is the first complete cycle of the symphonies recorded by a French orchestra, which isn't so strange considering the sceptical attitude long held by that country's musical establishment towards Sibelius (though audiences in France appear to lap him up when he's played there). Paavo Järvi tells it straight in the booklet: no music director of the Orchestre de Paris before him had shown any interest in Nordic music, so he made it his mission while in post to let his ensemble feel the love for Sibelius over a five-year period.

You can hear that love in these live performances from a lustrous, characterful orchestra at the Salle Pleyel and latterly the Philharmonie de Paris. Very little is substandard, nothing is library choice, the playing is bold and the lack of interpretative

baggage can be refreshing. Culturally speaking, Järvi's Estonia is the closest place to Finland on earth and the conductor tells of how much the music means to him. It might be down to orchestra, rather than conductor, that these performances are distinctly less Nordic in feel than the same conductor's recordings of non-symphonic Sibelius from Stockholm.

By 'Nordic' I mean, in one sense, the culture of buttoning emotions up until they explode out, which is both interpretative and textual – subconscious and consciously strived for. Much of the time Järvi's climaxes feel less like breakthroughs than they do from others (his dad, Vänskä, Storgårds, Colin Davis), whether because the build-up is drawn out or too emphatic (finale of No 1, latter quarter of No 7), because the ratio of fire to ice tips towards the former (No 2, second movement), or because you occasionally feel the hand of the conductor at work (No 7, the string hymn). There are plenty of caressing interventions from Järvi that reveal his vision of this as European Romantic music, even if some of the big tunes (finales of No 2 and No 3) aren't consciously phrased as that viewpoint would suggest they might be.

Nor have these musicians laid to rest the unanswerable question of whether Sibelius's figurations are material or accompaniment. Great Sibelius performances have a way of placing all that patterning in a near-but-far hinterland so it can appear neither one nor the other – and, therefore, both at the same time – but the Orchestre de Paris often present it as if on a platter (Symphony No 6, 2'30" into the first movement, and Symphony No 7 at 14 bars before the *Adagio*). That can cause problems further down the line when the miracle of the writing depends on the mysterious combination of levels of activity and what emerges in between them. Rhythmic subtleties are occasionally papered over (Sibelius's sectional ragging at 2'15" and 4'30" in the first movement of No 5) and sometimes you feel Järvi has worked hard to find a tempo that works for this front-footed orchestra but that it serves structure less well than it does immediate sonority. What suffers is sureness of direction and a sense of absolute inevitability.

In No 3, perhaps the finest performance here (and one of the later recordings, from March 2016), the orchestra comes closest to letting itself be carried by Sibelius's symphonic river, while in the Sixth and Seventh (recorded two years earlier) I feel the playing is too generally emphatic to convey a gravitational force and we come close to losing the line, especially in the latter, which gets bogged down. On the flipside, Järvi proves excellent at sustaining tension through the whiteouts of No 4 with help from an orchestra whose string tone has a sheen that can sound as ominous as it does luxurious (this was the last to be recorded).

The assiduously deployed grandeur in that performance isn't always an asset elsewhere. It can skew balance in No 3 and No 6, contributing to the idea that it's possible to prepare climaxes too far back in the score and meaning we sometimes miss the sense of strain in the writing. Solos can be a little showy, not least the trombone in No 7 (certainly not traced) and a vibrato-laden flute elsewhere. Yet the sound of the full ensemble itself, well recorded, remains distinct and impressive. In some of these masterpieces' most important pages, you can fault the preparation but not the thrilling sound Järvi gets from his orchestra in the moment. G

depths to the same consistent degree it does in Brabbins's perceptive reading, which manages to fuse this ambitious canvas's poetic reach, emotional pull and architectural splendour to nourishingly whole effect. When push comes to shove, then, I would not be inclined to place this painstakingly prepared newcomer ahead of Brabbins's gloriously unforced account – to say nothing of the 1953 Boult (7/94), Handley (2/89), Haitink (1/90) and Elder (A/15) – but anyone who has been collecting Manze's never-less-than-stimulating RVW series should most certainly investigate.

Andrew Achenbach

'Baïka'

Khachaturian Violin Concerto^a. Trio for Clarinet, Violin and Piano^b **Rimsky-Korsakov** Sheherazade (arr Sedlar)^c **Sedlar** Savcho 3^d **Nemanja Radulović** vn^b **Andreas Ottensamer** cl^b **Laure Favre-Kahn**, **Stéphanie Fontanarosa** pf^b **Aleksandar Sedlar** perc^b **Double Sens**; **Borusan Istanbul Philharmonic Orchestra** / **Sascha Goetzel** DG (F) 479 7545GH (78' • DDD)



'Baïka' is the French transliteration of the Serbian 'bajka', meaning 'tales'. It is the title of the Franco-Serbian violinist Nemanja Radulović's latest album, which spins stories from Khachaturian's Armenia, Rimsky-Korsakov's Baghdad and Aleksandar Sedlar's Black Sea, even though only one of the works is vaguely programmatic.

Vulgar. Brash. Stale. Aram Khachaturian's music has been the frequent target for criticism over the decades. It's often music painted in bold primary colours but I find its rhythmic drive, broad brushstrokes and sheer exuberance highly infectious, especially the 1940 Violin Concerto, which constitutes the main work on this disc. Immediately one notes the bite of the Borusan Istanbul Philharmonic under Sascha Goetzel and Radulović's gritty tone as he digs into the five-note opening motif. However, this is no power drive through the concerto. Radulović can be aggressive, with plenty of fire in his double-stopping, but he never pushes the dynamics too hard – where the score is marked *mezzo-forte*, he plays *mezzo-forte* – and finds more poetry in this concerto than its critics give it credit.

In the first movement, he plays David Oistrakh's cadenza, 'more brilliant violinistically', according to the

dedicatee's son, Igor. This bucks something of a trend – Julia Fischer, Sergey Khachaturyan and James Ehnes have all recorded Khachaturian's original cadenza. Radulović dispatches it with energy and firepower, and the coda is exhilarating.

The *Andante sostenuto* second movement has the quality of an Armenian lullaby, Radulović playing the mute section (track 2, 7'51") with whispered, papery-thin tone, while the finale is taken at an invigorating tempo. Oistrakh's recording with the composer conducting the Philharmonia is indispensable but Radulović and Goetzel take the palm as my favourite modern rendition.

The couplings are imaginatively chosen. Rimsky-Korsakov's orchestral warhorse *Sheherazade* is arranged by Aleksandar Sedlar for Radulović and his piano-and-string ensemble Double Sens. It's an affectionate tribute, cutting the score to half its original length, solo violin playing not just Sheherazade's lines but also various woodwind themes. It's mostly tasteful, although one episode whirls off into something approaching a Viennese waltz at one incongruous point in the third movement (track 6, 3'25").

Khachaturian's Trio for clarinet, violin and piano has little serious competition on disc (although, curiously enough, the Zurich Ensemble also programme it alongside a chamber version of *Sheherazade*). Andreas Ottensamer is the beguiling clarinettist, weaving sinuous arabesques with Radulović, while Laure Favre-Kahn caresses the *allargando e espressivo* lines in the middle movement nicely. After a slinky clarinet solo, the finale imitates Armenian folk dance, most persuasively performed here.

There is a fun Sedlar encore: *Savcho 3*, a transcription of a movement from a saxophone concerto. Via streaming, you also get Sedlar's *Turkey*, both works featuring rollicking rhythms and swooning violin. With Nemanja Radulović as narrator, this is an album with entrancing tales to tell.

Mark Pullinger

Khachaturian Violin Concerto – selected comparisons:

D Oistrakh, Philh Orch, Khachaturian
(12/55^R) (WARN) 361570-2

Khachaturyan, Sinf Varsovia, Krivine
(1/04) (NAIV) V4959

J Fischer, Russian Nat Orch, Kreizberg
(1/05) (PENT) PTC518 6059

Ehnes, Melbourne SO, M Wigglesworth
(7/14) (ONYX) ONYX4121

Clarinet Trio – selected comparison:

Zurich Ens (1/15) (PALA) PMR0036

'Music for my Love, Vol 2'

Bacri Prélude aux chants d'amour **Corp**
The Wings of Memory **Hautekiet** **Alex's**
Waltz **Hickey** **Single Malt** **Kinsella** **Amhrán**
do Yodit **D Matthews** **A June Song** **Ramey**
Symphonic Song **G Rose** **Eritrean Sunset**
and **Tigrinya Dance** **Serebrier** **Last Tango**
before **Sunrise** **Schurmann** **Nefertiti**
R Walker **She Moved Through The Fair**
Whilds 176 Reasons ...
Ukrainian Festival Orchestra / Paul Mann
Toccata Classics (F) TOCC0370 (72' • DDD)



I detailed the genesis of this extraordinary series for string orchestra – inspired not by some European aristocrat or royal, but a humble Eritrean expatriate, Yodit Tekle – when reviewing Vol 1 (1/17). A further disc-and-a-half is already in the can, and the number of composers who have responded to the call has risen to over 100; simply astonishing.

If anything, the standard of invention here is higher than on its wonderful predecessor. David Matthews's *A June Song* (since reworked into his Ninth Symphony) and John Kinsella's *Song for Yodit* are the most sheerly beautiful, though Ronald Corp's *The Wings of Memory*, imagining 'her soul on its journey accompanied by a crowd of angels' is enchanting. There are compositions of considerable musical heft: Phillip Ramey's *Symphonic Song*; Robin Walker's modal fantasy *She Moved Through The Fair* (the largest and finest work here); Richard Whilds's 176 Reasons ... (one reason per string on each of the 44 players' instruments). No less artful are the simpler pieces by Nicolas Bacri, Sean Hickey, Gerard Schurmann and José Serebrier, and Gregory Rose's delightful Eritrean arrangements. The focus shifts between Yodit, her partner Martin (founder of Toccata Classics) and – in Wim Hautekiet's charming *Alex's Waltz* – their son.

Paul Mann again extracts performances of great sensitivity, this time from the Ukrainian Festival Orchestra in Lviv, captured in terrifically clear sound. Another moving release that I have on repeat.

Guy Rickards

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Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No 1

Vadym Kholodenko discusses the work's form, tempo and expression with Michelle Assay

The last time I saw Vadym Kholodenko he was 12 years old and wearing a big bow tie. Twenty years on, the now internationally established Ukrainian looks slightly perplexed at my intended icebreaker, so I explain that it was when I was a first-year conservatoire student in Kiev and he was competing in the junior section of the Horowitz piano competition, where he took second prize.

It was around that time that the young Kholodenko first encountered Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No 1; it was the second piece he had ever performed with orchestra. Glancing through the score on his tablet – so much more high tech than my poor little Kalmus miniature edition – he reminiscences, pointing to the three-hand effect from fig 23 in the *Andante assai* quasi-second movement: 'I remember how I felt excited about the bits with the three-stave layout.' Having had access to Vladimir Krainev's barnstorming account of the concerto, Kholodenko had thought him a god to be able to play such music. Nowadays, he also admires Yefim Bronfman's interpretation. I resist the temptation to mention novelist Philip Roth's tongue-in-cheek description of 'Bronfman the brontosaurus'; instead we discuss Krainev's reputation as an *enfant terrible* or, as Kholodenko puts it, 'a copy of Prokofiev in personality'.

Kholodenko, who has now recorded the work with the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra for Harmonia Mundi, remembers how teachers in his student days routinely described the concerto as 'hooligan' or 'football' music. He, by contrast, believes strongly in its Romantic roots. 'If you open the very first page you see those tiny hairpin markings, which tell me that the piece is very expressive ... this music is very romantically infused. It's not yet music of the 20th century.' We regularly touch on a comparison with Rachmaninov in our discussions. Kholodenko refers to Bruno Monsaingeon's documentary *Richter – The Enigma* (1998) and Richter's notion that Prokofiev's 'crankiness' with Rachmaninov might have been a result of the great influence of the latter, 'in particular on the opening of this concerto'. I suggest that there's a more obviously Rachmaninovian feeling to the start of the 'three-handed' slow section, with its long, luscious melodic lines. But Kholodenko disagrees; to him this section is quintessentially Prokofiev. I then venture a comparison with Shostakovich's First Piano Concerto, but he finds Shostakovich's concertos even more concentrated than this one. 'And Shostakovich's is definitely new music and cinema music. It's the experience of a man in the new world. Whereas Prokofiev is still in transition from the old Russia.'

We look at the solo section that follows the introduction (fig 3). It has all the hallmarks of a fragment from a conservatoire student's exercise book. For Kholodenko, this is one of many reminders of Scarlatti, except that the range is expanded over several more octaves. 'The concerto's roots in Romantic music are also revealed in that it reflects how Romantic composers were taught as pianists: Hanon



'Music is richer than any words': Kholodenko resists descriptive imagery in music

(five-finger exercises), Czerny (scales), arpeggios. This was Rachmaninov's piano training too.'

Having heard Krainev's supersonic 14-minute account just before our meeting, I am curious to know how Kholodenko manoeuvres around Prokofiev's single metronome marking (minim=88 at the beginning). 'I spent hours with my conductor, Miguel Harth-Bedoya, finding appropriate tempi that were not just suitable for individual sections but the overall structure.' Choosing a tempo on the slow side for the opening, Kholodenko picks up at the *Poco più mosso* (fig 3) and then doesn't shift tempo significantly, despite taking a lot of freedom and rubatos in general, in order to give the quasi-first movement a large-scale coherence.

The episodic nature of the piece was already criticised during Prokofiev's lifetime. I decide to read out a fragment from the composer's diary, where he mocks negative attitudes towards the form of his concerto. Kholodenko responds: 'I tried to make it a whole thing, but I realise it's not Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. This is not a novel – it's more like an essay. I also think of it as a concerto grosso, where the attention is not entirely on the piano alone, but on other instruments too.'

For Kholodenko, a great deal of the humour of the piece is in the orchestral colours (such as the tuba, trumpet and bassoon) and the 'sour' harmonies: 'I noticed that if I play too fast the humour does not emerge. So I, Miguel and the orchestra decided to set the grotesque moments of those instruments in relief, instead of concealing them with a fast tempo.'

I ask him about the *accelerando* (from fig 16) that eventually leads to the return of the introduction theme. 'We decided that I will always be following the conductor ... If I am a soloist not sharing with the rest of the musicians, then the meaning of the music is lost.' He tells me how they went about the tricky three bars before the *Allegro scherzando* (between figs 26 and 27) in order to be together, agreeing beforehand that the orchestra should place the chords each time, taking the signal from his shaping of the contours of the piano's *ad libitum* passage.

The *Allegro scherzando* encapsulates what Kholodenko describes as ‘the madness of youth’. But in general he is resistant to descriptive imagery: ‘Let’s say I have other ways of approaching and understanding a piece of music. I don’t use any imagery, but I try to find the appropriate feeling ... I believe music is richer than any words.’ For him, the way to approach Prokofiev’s works is through his ballet music, ‘just as one approaches Beethoven through his string quartets, and Shostakovich through his symphonies’.

'I think of it as a concerto grosso, where the attention is not entirely on the piano alone, but on other instruments too'

We are at the final cadenza now. He tells me that he asked the tuba and horn players to be as loud as possible here, in order to accentuate the humour. It is indeed a grotesque episode; the orchestra plays some mock-serious Verdian oom-pahs and then stops, apparently assuming that the piano will respond in kind. But instead, it starts goofing around. Coming to the final *tutti*, we talk about how the glockenspiel gives an edge to the piano sound, guarding against the danger that it will be swamped. Kholodenko compares this with Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto, where the piano is inevitably drowned out beneath the orchestra's opening passagework.

The recording of this concerto is the result of three consecutive concerts in 2015, in which Concerto No 1 followed No 4 in the first half. (Concerto No 3 was added in 2017.) Kholodenko remembers how in the dress rehearsal, having performed the left-hand-only Fourth Concerto, he realised that his right hand had become completely paralysed. So for the concert, the management arranged for an upright piano to be placed backstage so that he could warm up while the orchestra was retuning between pieces. ‘Still, I must say that my right hand felt weird for the first few chords of Concerto No 1.’

He chose an American Steinway for its bright cutting quality, as he did for his Prokofiev Third Concerto in the 2013 Van Cliburn competition (where he took first prize), despite having played on a Hamburg Steinway for his solo programme and Mozart concerto. For the first volume of his Prokofiev cycle, the critically acclaimed disc of the Second and Fifth Concertos, he was surprised to find himself preferring the experience of live recording over the studio. 'I find that doing five or six takes of the same bit destroys the nature of the music, and the feeling of the long phrase is lost ... A series of right notes isn't yet a musical impression.'

I would trade a few wrong notes for real music.' **G**
Kholodenko's new Prokofiev recording will be reviewed next issue

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Arnold Whittall immerses himself in the music of Nigel Osborne: 'As ever, Osborne turns away from complacent ideas about music's place in the world and the composer's place in society' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 55**



Charlotte Gardner enjoys a very personal album from Sueye Park: 'The double-stopped harmonics have a tonal quality akin to running a wet finger over a crystal glass' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 57**

Beach · C Schumann · Smyth

G

Beach Violin Sonata, Op 34. **Invocation**, Op 55. Romance, Op 23 **C Schumann** Drei Romanzen, Op 22 **Smyth** Violin Sonata, Op 7
Tasmin Little vn **John Lenehan** pf
Chandos Ⓜ CHAN20030 (71' • DDD)



For a neglected Romantic violin sonata, being recorded by Tasmin Little and John Lenehan

must feel like going to heaven. Neither the 1897 sonata by Amy Beach nor its slightly earlier counterpart by Ethel Smyth is new to the catalogue, but neither, surely, has ever been treated to anything like Little's gleaming, endlessly fluid tone or John Lenehan's warmly characterised, unfailingly sensitive pianism.

The Beach comes first, and although Chandos have already served it well with an expansive account from Gabrielle Lester (1/04), there's a flexibility and sense of sweep to Little and Lenehan's performance that's utterly persuasive on its own terms: meltingly tender as the pair ease into the first movement's second group, and dark and questioning in the *con dolore* slow movement. The two players respond to each other as if by instinct, giving a playful glint to the outer sections of the Scherzo (Little wears her virtuosity with delicious insouciance) and emerging from the storms of the finale with terrific sweep.

That's the most thrilling moment in Ethel Smyth's Sonata too. As with the Beach, Little and Lenehan let the four movements follow their own, cumulative course from lyrical opening to tempestuous finale, without ignoring the many pleasures to be found along the way – like the little folksy interludes that punctuate the melancholy lilt of Smyth's slow movement. Perhaps Clara Schumann's *Drei Romanzen* could have felt a little more inward – these readings are nothing if not upfront – but it's hard to object to this kind of assurance

coupled to such a fabulous sound, and in Beach's Op 23 Romance, the pair trace the journey from intimate confession to high-romantic ardour with poetry and utter conviction. A wonderful performance.

Richard Bratby

Beethoven · J Strauss II · Weber/Küffner

Beethoven Septet, Op 20^a **J Strauss II** Frühlingsstimmen^b. Perpetuum mobile^b (both arr Johnson) **Weber/Küffner** Introduction, Theme and Variations^c
Emma Johnson cl^a **Philip Gibbon** bn^a **Peter Francombe** hn^{ac} **Chris West** db^b **bc** **Carducci Quartet** (Matteo Denton, Michelle Fleming vns
Eoin Schmidt-Martin va^a Emma Denton vc) Somm Céleste Ⓜ SOMMCD0190 (58' • DDD)
Recorded live at the Turner Sims Concert Hall, University of Southampton, October 7, 2017



Plenty of charismatic playing here, in a programme clearly planned to entertain.

The main attraction is Beethoven's Septet – not the mighty, heaven-storming Beethoven but the composer in deliciously melodic mode. Around it are a *morceaux de concert* once attributed to Weber but now thought to be by a military bandmaster called Joseph Küffner (1776–1856) and a pair of New Year's Day *bonnes bouches*.

Mistress of ceremonies is Emma Johnson, who seems barely to have aged since she won the BBC Young Musician of the Year competition all of 35 years ago. She is joined by the ever-reliable Carducci Quartet and a trio of principals from various regional orchestras. This sequence was taken live from a concert in 2017 and the audience's delight in it is audible, although, surprisingly, applause has been excised solely from the penultimate number, Strauss's *Frühlingsstimmen*. This palpable liveness leads to the occasional missed note or frayed ensemble which would surely have been papered over in the studio – Johnson perhaps takes a minute or

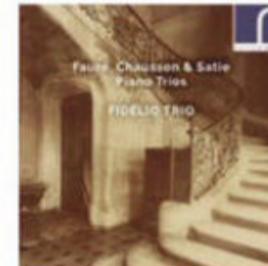
two to warm up into the opening Weber/Küffner – but this barely detracts from the splendid time that is clearly being had by all.

Honourable mentions to the violinist Matthew Denton, the cellist Emma Denton for her elastic bass line in the Weber, and the cornist Peter Francombe and double bassist Chris West for their characterful contributions in the Septet. And Johnson's reimaginings of the two closing Strauss numbers are as frothy as a glass of bubbly.

David Thrasher

Chausson · Fauré · Satie

Chausson Piano Trio, Op 3 **Fauré** Piano Trio, Op 120 **Satie** Messe des Pauvres - Prière pour le salut de mon âme (arr John White). Le piége de Méduse
Fidelio Trio Resonus Ⓜ RES10232 (57' • DDD)



The Fidelio Trio made Editor's Choice for their Ravel and Saint-Saëns piano trios for Resonus (11/16), and this further foray into French repertoire is equally top-notch.

First, Chausson's early-career Trio of 1881, and the Fidelio Trio's playing hits both its dramatically big-boned and its more delicate writing on the head. Their approach to tempo also works a treat, with the two forward-driving slower movements very much honouring their respective *Not too slow* and *Quite slow* markings, and a faster pair which maintain salonesque dignity while thoroughly catching the mood, for instance through the excitement of Mary Dullea's elegantly delivered concerto-like fourth-movement piano figures.

In fact delicacy and flow are the watchwords across the album, as you hear again in the Fauré Trio, whose first movement's expertly moulded super-long lines are a study in sustained tension, although do also look up Trio Karenine's beautiful recording of this work on Mirare



Intimate confession to high-romantic ardour: Tasmin Little and John Lenehan revel in the music of Amy Beach, Ethel Smyth and Clara Schumann

last year, which has a similar degree of polish and subtlety while being ever so slightly less cool.

Climactic spice then comes via John White's new arrangements, specially commissioned by the trio, of incidental music by Eric Satie. First, the antique otherworldliness of the 'Prière pour le salut de mon âme' from the organ *Messe des Pauvres*, Satie's only liturgical work; not the first time this has been arranged for strings but no less exquisite for that fact, especially in this tautly expressive reading. Next, seven quirky charming miniatures from Satie's self-penned play of 1913, *La piège de Méduse*, which in the drama were danced by a mechanical monkey. Satie himself conducted a private performance of these featuring small orchestra but it was in piano solo form that they were eventually published in 1929, and if you want a painstakingly coloured piano account then listen to Alexandre Tharaud's 2009 recording, where he evokes the tinny mechanical sound as Satie himself probably did, ie by placing sheets of paper on the strings; and while no paper was rumpled in the making of this particular transcription,

that quality is still effectively brought off by White through clever use of the piano's dampener and pizzicato, and by the trio themselves through pinpoint metrical exactitude and singing delivery.

Add the personality of the recording space of New Maltings in Alpheton, Suffolk, and this is one to savour.

Charlotte Gardner

Dvořák
Piano Quartets - No 1, Op 23 B53;
No 2, Op 87 B162

Dvořák Piano Quartet
Supraphon F SU4257-2 (73' • DDD)



It's good to have another disc pairing Dvořák's two piano quartets – not as

popular a choice as you might imagine – and you'd expect an ensemble named after the composer to be at one with his music. The Dvořák Quartet bring an endearing affability to the opening movement of the First Piano Quartet, slightly more relaxed

in pace than the Busch Trio with Miguel da Silva, whose recording I much admired in 2017. They're also fully alive to the musing quality of the theme on which the second-movement variations are built, contrasting this nicely with the bright-eyed first variation. The second, though, sounds a touch over-egged – the Busch/da Silva are more naturally yearning here. But the Dvořák Quartet's pianist, Slávka Vernerová-Pěchočová, sets the scene in the fourth with just the right degree of drama to the rolled chords, while the players capture to a nicety the fraught quality of the fifth variation and the gently consoling coda. The genial finale comes across well too, though the Busch/da Silva are more playful here, their delight in the music palpable. Both groups remind us that this is a work that deserves to be much better known.

There are fine things in the Second Quartet, too, and the Dvořák Quartet offer the ideal combination of strength and rounded sonorities at the outset. The duet between cello and piano that opens the second movement is also judged just right – heartfelt yet without exaggeration,

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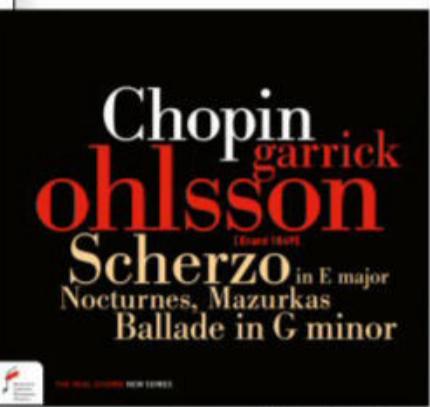
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the pizzicato of the other two instruments there but not intrusive; by comparison, Torleif Thedéen and Polina Leschenko in the live recording from Lugano use more rubato and sound more interventionist – I prefer the greater naturalness of this new set, or those by the Suk Piano Quartet and the aforementioned Busch/da Silva. But whereas the Suk really push through the tumultuous passagework, the new account (track 5, 3'08") gives more emphasis to the strength of the writing. In the third movement, the Dvořák Quartet revel in the cimbalom effects without overdoing them, though some may find their speed a little slow. And the finale has pace and energy and works better than the Lugano account, which seems to be chivvying us along, losing some of the piece's sparkle as a result.

Overall, then, a fine new addition to the Dvořák discography. **Harriet Smith**

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Busch Trio, da Silva (12/17) (ALPH) ALPHA288

Piano Quartet No 2 – selected comparisons:

Leschenko, Gringolts, Braude, Thedéen

(8/13) (EMI/WARN) 721119-2

Josef Suk Pf Qt (A/17) (SUPR) SU4227-2

Franck • Vierne • Boulanger • Ysaÿe

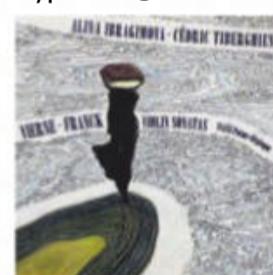
G

Boulanger Nocturne Franck Violin Sonata

Vierne Violin Sonata, Op 23 Ysaÿe Poème élégiaque, Op 12

Alina Ibragimova vn Cédric Tiberghien pf

Hyperion F CDA68204 (78' • DDD)



While we're not short of top-drawer recordings of Franck's Violin Sonata, I'm still not sure whether I've ever encountered it sitting within such a musically and musicologically tempting programme as this one from Alina Ibragimova and Cédric Tiberghien. Not, I might add, that the Franck Sonata should necessarily be seen as the main event here, despite its fame. *Au contraire*, one of the chief draws is the way it sits in equal balance within the whole, each work informing and being informed by its neighbours.

To deal first with the programming, all paths (or almost all paths) lead back to the great French violinist Eugène Ysaÿe: his *Poème élégiaque* of 1892, based on the tomb scene of *Romeo and Juliet*, followed by the Franck Sonata, which was a wedding present to him in 1886, and the 1908 Violin Sonata he commissioned from Franck's fellow organist-composer

Louis Vierne. Then a final petit four in the form of Lili Boulanger's *Nocturne*, written only three years after the Vierne but ushering in a new era with its slightly leaner aesthetic and its final little quotation from Debussy's *L'après-midi d'une faune*.

As for the actual sound, superb playing and ravishing engineering intertwine here to stunning effect. It's a modern set-up – Ibragimova on a 1775 Anselmo Bellosio strung with metal, with Tiberghien on a very beautiful and relatively new Steinway D – and it serves as a reminder that you don't necessarily need period instruments to bring a lightness and air-filled delineation to these densely textured late-Romantic works. (In fact, note here that if your personal taste is for something slightly lusher-textured or bigger-boned then you may wish to stick with Dumay and Pires, or perhaps Hadelich and Yang).

Still, listen to the sombre depth and steadily direct tone Ibragimova brings to the *Poème élégiaque*'s central *grave et lent* section, and the rich sonority of Tiberghien's accompanying death knells. Or the gripping passion with which Ibragimova delivers both its soaring long lines and its virtuoso moments.

Moving on to the Franck, soak up the weightless, time-suspended softness with which they begin: from Ibragimova a sweet, even sound that's light-toned without being lightweight, supported by a touch from Tiberghien at the keyboard that sounds like mellow, amber-hued raindrops, and all the while a gradual crescendo and strengthening of tone from both so subtle that it happens almost imperceptibly. Another joy is the expansive third movement with its succession of contrasts between crescendos to climaxes – which come long-spun, unegged and noble from Ibragimova – and the softest and sweetest of *pianissimo dolcissimo* interludes. Then after that, hear the further contrast provided by the final movement's sunny-hued velocity.

The Vierne *Allegro risoluto* equally showcases sharper-edged energy, and yet more golden tenderness with its *Andante sostenuto*. Add the palette-cleansing Boulanger, and this is wall-to-wall wonderful. **Charlotte Gardner**

Henderickx

In Deep Silence III. Makyo^a. Two Nocturnes^b.

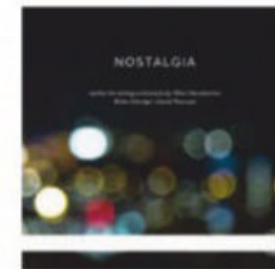
Nostalgia^c. Four Pieces^d

^{bc}Valerie Debaele fl ^{cd}Roeland Henderickx cl

^{ad}Lin Chin Cheng marimba

Boho Strings / David Ramael

Antarctica F ARO11 (58' • DDD)



The number of string ensembles active may be considerable but *Boho Strings* is second to none in terms of its dynamism and unanimity of response. Such qualities are to the fore on this first studio project, devoted to the music of the Belgian composer Wim Henderickx (b1962).

As yet little heard in the UK, Henderickx writes demonstrably while never slavishly from a postmodernist perspective – witness the *Four Pieces* (1990), their clarinet part replete with folk-music inflections and string-writing which ranges from Bartókian incisiveness to a spare inwardness redolent of late Shostakovich. Reworked (as were almost all these items) for the present group, it makes for a viable entity. Less varied in expression, *Two Nocturnes* (1993) elide sombre chromatic harmonies with diaphanous texture of Impressionist import, while the similarly slow-moving *In Deep Silence III* (2003) evinces a Feldman-like stasis which makes its allusion to Haydn the more intriguing. Evidently the realisation of a dream, *Makyo* (1990) is the most integrated of these pieces in its juxtaposing the confrontational and contemplative, with solo marimba affording a degree of expressive poise. *Nostalgia* (2010) uses its obbligato instruments in a context of non-Western tuning for an otherworldliness that evokes the existential isolation of Andrei Tarkovsky as tangibly as any Middle Eastern landscape.

Fuller consideration of Henderickx's music must await recording of some of his larger works but the present selection is generally persuasive, with David Ramael securing an impressive response from *Boho Strings* – recorded with the clarity yet spaciousness this music requires.

Richard Whitehouse

Hoffmeister • Rossini

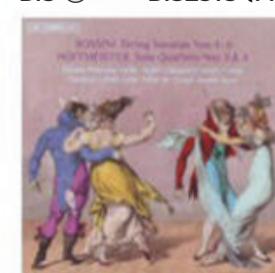
Hoffmeister Four Solo Quartets^a – No 3; No 4

Rossini Six String Sonatas^b – No 4; No 5; No 6

Minna Pensola vn Antti Tikkonen ^bvn/va

Tuomas Lehto vc Niek de Groot db

BIS F BIS2318 (77' • DDD/DSD)



It's possible to have mixed feelings about Franz Anton Hoffmeister. As a publisher, he gave the world Mozart's Quartet K499; less happily, he also advised Mozart that his two piano quartets were

too difficult for sale, thus nipping an entire genre in the bud. Yet technical difficulty clearly didn't prevent him from composing, in his own right, four highly virtuoso if slightly foursquare 'solo quartets' for string trio plus a double bass, which – soaring high above its normal register – effectively takes the place of a first violin.

The four players on this disc have already recorded the first two quartets (4/18), and I can only echo David Threasher's admiration for Niek de Groot's characterful playing of the solo bass parts by which these pieces stand or fall. De Groot's top register is particularly sweet, and his phrasing is shapely – both real assets in music which, with the best will in the world, is more polite than inspired. The other three players offer affectionate, elegant support, captured in sound that's spacious but slightly boomy, especially in the crucial bottom register.

Again, as on the first disc in the series, BIS has paired the Hoffmeister with three of the 12-year-old Rossini's String Sonatas – and in this more familiar music the ensemble's weaknesses are more pronounced. While cellist Tuomas Lehto positively scampers over Rossini's exuberant high-lying passagework, violinist Minna Pensola sounds less comfortable, occasionally smudging the intonation. And even in Rossini's juvenilia, it doesn't seem unreasonable to expect performances that are a bit more flamboyant, more spirited: in a word, more operatic. The tempos here verge on the languid. Still, as background music to a dinner party – surely Hoffmeister's destiny, if not Rossini's – they'll probably do just fine.

Richard Bratby

Korngold · Zemlinsky

Korngold Piano Trio, Op 1

Zemlinsky Piano Trio, Op 3

Stefan Zweig Trio

Ars Produktion (F) ARS38 264 (60' • DDD/DSD)



The coupling isn't as common as you'd think, which is explained in part by

the contradictory currents that were swirling around Vienna in the two decades surrounding 1900 but also those that filled the heads of these two impressionable young geniuses. Their two trios don't sound as complementary as might be imagined. The 13-year-old Korngold's Piano Trio is a long way from the satin fluency and cinematic cut-and-thrust with which the Viennese composer would make

his name. There's plenty of invention but some of it sounds received, not least in the stop-start opening *Allegro*, 11 minutes long.

Is it best to power through with impetus and edge – as the Stefan Zweig Trio do here – or try for something more noble and mahogany, as the Beaux Arts Trio's classic recording does? That's a tricky one but this ensemble's decision to take the former approach seems like a wise one. Others might have revealed a little more of the Scherzo's burlesque qualities but the ensemble isn't tempted to over-indulge those occasional glimpses of art nouveau curvature in the same movement that probably aren't ripe enough for full exploitation. Some of the long-held violin lines of the *Larghetto* might have benefited from a little more tempering of vibrato (both its intensity and the timing of when it kicks in, which seems pretty uniform) but that same intensity is a good fit for the pulsating finale.

While Korngold's Trio tries to look forwards from 1910, Zemlinsky's tries to look back from 1896. Zemlinsky set out to pay homage to Brahms but at least in his piece, originally a clarinet trio, he doesn't overly check the flow of his compositional impulse, one reason this heaving performance feels that bit more right-on. If Brahms caused Zemlinsky problems, perhaps it was in the latter's tendency to want to contain his density rather than spread it out. This is Zemlinsky no more fully fledged than its Korngold counterpart, but we do sense a composer starting to twist the kaleidoscope. It sounds, from their approach, like the Stefan Zweig Trio wish he'd twisted it even more. **Andrew Mellor**

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Beaux Arts Trio (1/94) (PHIL) D 434 072-2PH

Lutosławski · Penderecki

Lutosławski Partita. Recitativo e arioso. Subito

Penderecki Violin Sonatas – No 1; No 2. Three Miniatures

Michael Foyle vn Maksim Štšura pf

Delphian (F) DCD34217 (73' • DDD)



It was an astute move of the Foyle-Štšura Duo to combine the outputs for violin and piano by Lutosławski and Penderecki, as numerous points of similarity and contrast – between both their respective works as well as those of each composer – are afforded by the comparison.

With Lutosławski, the tensile interplay of incisiveness and plangency in *Subito* (1992) is not a world away from the poised

lyricism of *Recitativo e arioso* (1951), written at the height of Stalinist influence in Poland. It is interesting just how effectively the youthful Penderecki handles this issue in his First Sonata (1953), whose three succinct movements allude to Prokofiev and Bartók without denying a Socialist Realist aesthetic. A changed cultural climate is evident in the *Three Miniatures* (1959), with its frequently stark pointillism and Weernesque asperity.

The two large-scale pieces typify both composers in their full maturity. The largest chamber work of his later years, *Partita* (1984) finds Lutosławski taking well-honed procedures to a new peak of refinement – its propulsive outer movements framing brief *ad libitum* passages that provide for emotional 'breathing space' and which, in turn, frame a central *Largo* whose fervent eloquence is thereby made the more affecting. If Penderecki's Second Sonata (1999) feels at all diffuse by comparison, it features one of this composer's most finely realised movements in a central *Notturno* as haunting as it is evocative. Before it, the speculative *Larghetto* and capricious *Allegretto* make for a viable continuity; less so the ensuing *Allegro*, whose over-inflated and hectoring rhetoric rather undermines the plaintiveness of the brief final *Andante*.

Such is not the fault of Michael Foyle or Maksim Štšura, who project a determined cohesion, even if Anne-Sophie Mutter is unequalled in the Second Sonata for her imperiousness. Still, with its sound of unsparing immediacy, the many virtues of this disc can hardly be gainsaid.

Richard Whitehouse

Penderecki Violin Sonata No 2 – selected comparison:

Mutter, Orkis (11/18) (DG) 483 5163GH2

Myaskovsky · Rachmaninov

Myaskovsky Cello Sonata No 1, Op 12^a

Rachmaninov Cello Sonata, Op 19^a

Two Pieces, Op 2^a. Prélude, Op 3 No 2

^aBruno Philippe vc Jérôme Ducros pf

Harmonia Mundi (F) HMM90 2340 (71' • DDD)



Bruno Philippe is still only 25 but you wouldn't guess from the maturity of his musical thinking, which is coupled with a songfulness and ravishing sound – essential qualities for Rachmaninov. We get not only the G minor Sonata but the slighter Prelude and 'Danse orientale', Op 2, which are well characterised without being



Rhythmic energy and expressive directness: the Hebrides Ensemble bring Nigel Osborne's music to life

overdone. Jérôme Ducros also contributes a nuanced reading of that piece the composer grew to loathe: his C sharp minor Prelude, Op 3 No 2.

In the Sonata itself, Philippe gives Weilerstein a run for her money in the way he moulds the opening movement, his penchant for *cantabile* playing put to fine use in the *Allegro moderato*'s dreamier moments – sample from 11'30" of track 6 (they both, incidentally, include the exposition repeat, which Isserlis omits).

The scherzo is a mix of darting energy, well set up by Ducros, and unashamed melodic lusciousness, though Isserlis and Hough make even more of the contrast, the latter not afraid to take things down to a murmur. Hough also sets the scene for the *Andante* with a poetry that Ducros can't quite match. Barnatan is also very inward at the outset, allowing Weilerstein to join the sighing phrases in the most potent way possible. That said, Philippe gives the melody a warmth that is ravishing. Isserlis and Hough really go for the finale, emphasising its churning energy. Philippe and Ducros dwell a little more on its lyrical aspects but such is the colour and reactivity on display that it's a very absorbing journey and the close –

skittish, then lyrical, then a final push through to the double bar line – is thrilling indeed.

How refreshing to have this sonata coupled with Myaskovsky's First Cello Sonata, a rarity in the studio. Cast in two movements, it was written in 1911, the year that he graduated from the St Petersburg Conservatoire, and subsequently revised. It begins with a recitative-like passage for cello against simple piano accompaniment and from then on it is generally the cello that has the more prominent role in the first movement. There are many compelling moments: listen to the way Philippe relishes the ascent into the cello's higher register (from 5'20", track 1). From the lyricism of the first movement, Myaskovsky leads, via a linking passage, to a more febrile second. This contrasts a churning emotionalism with more contemplative writing, cello and piano now very much equal partners. Throughout, Philippe and Ducros play with absolute conviction and make the strongest possible case for the piece.

Harriet Smith

Rachmaninov Cello Sonata – selected comparisons:

Isserlis, Hough (7/03) (HYPE) CDA67376

Weilerstein, Barnatan (11/15) (DECC) 478 8416DH

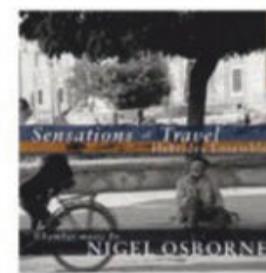
Osborne

'Sensations of Travel'

Balkan Dances and Laments. Ecological Studies. Espionage. My beloved, where are you going/ Adagio for Vedran Smailović. The Piano Tuner. Preludio y canción. Zone

Hebrides Ensemble / William Conway VC

Delphian  DCD34198 (70' • DDD)



This new Delphian release is a welcome tribute to the far-reaching musicianship of Nigel Osborne, who turned 70 last year and is as concerned as ever to turn away from comfortable, complacent ideas about music's place in the world and the composer's place in society. A university professor who has risked life and limb in Sarajevo; a composer who has been commissioned by Glyndebourne but also works with traumatised children around the world: what kind of music can possibly do justice to such variety of experience and diversity of commitment?

The Hebrides Ensemble's answer to that question is appropriately well varied; but two particularly substantial

instrumental works demonstrate the core qualities of rhythmic energy and expressive directness, combined to create a connected rather than fractured discourse, that have been Osborne's hallmarks down the years. *Zone* (1989) and *Balkan Dances and Laments* (2001) show how his early contacts with Polish expressionism helped him to refine his personal engagement with the time-honoured genres of Western art music while working in vividly ethnic aspects in ways that have nothing to do with picture-postcard charm. Travel, not tourism, in fact.

Osborne remains fascinated by the unique challenges of opera, and by the possibilities of using popular and folk-like idioms to give further definition to appropriate formal principles. Thus 2018's *Preludio y canción* (not unlike Osborne's famous 1993 cello piece *Adagio for Vedran Smailović*) keeps ways of cadencing modernistically fluid, while the various sets of short pieces relating to the opera *The Piano Tuner*, and to a project about the Cambridge spies (*Espionage: Studies in Poussin and Happenstance*), manage the difficult task of achieving expressive immediacy without lapsing, ironically or accidentally, into mere cliché. For the moment, I prefer *Espionage*'s three short movements for solo violin to the 'soundscapes' attached to *The Piano Tuner*'s 'preludes and fugues'. But Osborne's travels have become a kind of pilgrimage in search of relevance and responsibility that deserves serious attention, and these well-crafted recordings offer many different facets of an arrestingly contemporary musical voice. **Arnold Whittall**

Shostakovich

'Complete Chamber Music for Piano and Strings'

Violin Sonata, Op 134. Viola Sonata, Op 147.

Cello Sonata, Op 40. Moderato. Piano Trios -

No 1, Op 8; No 2, Op 67. Piano Quintet, Op 57

DSCH - Shostakovich Ensemble

Paraty (F) ② PARATY718232 (151' • DDD)



Collating Shostakovich's chamber works with piano has been

done (surprisingly?) seldom, though the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio tackled most of this repertoire three decades ago for Arabesque. Those recordings – particularly the duo sonatas – were characterised by spacious tempos and a striving for profundity typical of the period when this music became synonymous with

soul-searching and as a harbinger of the Soviet Union's eventual demise.

Those who still favour such interpretation may well be nonplussed by what is on offer here. Formed in 2006, the DSCH – Shostakovich Ensemble comprises musicians of the younger generation who, in these works at least, favour a taut and objective though never casual or facile approach – witness the stealthy accruing of momentum in the Fugue of the Piano Quintet; the ardency of its Intermezzo duly carried over to the Second Piano Trio, whose propulsive Scherzo and elegiac Lento are rounded off by a finale which draws its Jewish inflections into a lithe yet cumulative entity the more affecting when shorn of affectation.

Turning to the duo works, Adrian Brendel has the measure of the Cello Sonata – whether the taciturn manner of its opening movement and rapt poise of its *Largo* or the effervescence of its Scherzo and finale. The Violin Sonata has long been considered among Shostakovich's more intractable pieces but Corey Cerovsek brings out the bleakness of its opening *Moderato* and ensures the Scherzo's rhetoric never becomes hectoring, before delineating the variations of the Passacaglia with a palpable sense of their formal and expressive unity. Isabel Charisius evinces comparable insight in the Viola Sonata (the composer's swansong) as it unfolds from the speculative unease then sardonic humour of its initial two movements to a closing *Largo* which, whatever the nature of allusions real or imagined, conveys an undeniable benediction.

Here, as also in the impulsive early First Piano Trio and wistful elegance of the posthumously published *Moderato*, Filipe Pinto-Ribeiro contributes pianism as deft as it is perceptive. The sound is lean and keenly focused, in keeping with these performances, and there are extensive booklet notes. Anyone who is interested in current Shostakovich interpretation should certainly hear this set. **Richard Whitehouse**

Stockhausen

Kurzwellen

CLSI Ensemble

Mode (F) MOD-CD302 (48' • DDD)



The latter half of the 1960s is often referred to as Stockhausen's

'intuitive' period, when he largely abandoned the systematic serial planning of his music from the preceding decade in favour of an increasingly improvisational approach to composition; one where the response of the performers takes precedence over the instructions to which they respond. In fact, the formal parameters are by no means as amorphous as might appear, with *Kurzwellen* (1968) a notable instance of how Stockhausen delegated responsibility without abdicating control.

The pioneering versions of *Kurzwellen*, supervised by the composer (and currently available as Vol 13 of the Stockhausen Edition) are mainly of interest for featuring a stellar line-up of new-music exponents cast adrift in a controlled 'happening' that feels self-conscious compared to that by the CLSI Ensemble. Formed in 2007 to realise such projects, the eight musicians take on a range of acoustic and electronic instruments to which shortwave radio becomes at once a textural focus and structural continuum – however disparate the context.

How one assesses the result depends on how one responds to the underlying premise (which is explained at length and with insight by Leopoldo Siano in the booklet), but there can be no doubt this realisation honours the composer's intentions while imparting a deftness and even playfulness to the music-making, as sampling any of these 31 individual tracks should make plain. Moreover, the pan-cultural inclusiveness Stockhausen was at pains to convey is always apparent – the Circle for the Liberation of Sound and Image assuredly living up to its name. **Richard Whitehouse**

Thorvaldsdottir

'Aequa'

Aequilibria. Fields. Illumine. Reflections.

Scape. Sequences. Spectra

International Contemporary Ensemble with

Cory Smythe pf **Steven Schick** cond

Sono Luminus (F) (CD + Blu-ray) DSL92227



Hard on the heels of Nordic Affect's recording of Anna

Thorvaldsdottir's string trio *Reflections* (2016), in a fascinating mixed programme for Sono Luminus, comes another from this same label, part of a portrait-style disc containing six chamber and one instrumental piece.

I said previously that *Reflections* was a 'challenging' listen, 'though ... directly communicable', and this rather tauter, swifter account from the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE) diminishes the challenge and emphasises its communicability.

Tempo may be the crucial factor in this instance and throughout the ICE players seem to hit on just the right speeds and pace for each work. Not all come over equally successfully, nonetheless; the other string trio here, *Spectra* (2017), I found stubbornly elusive and non-engaging despite the undeniable commitment of Josh Modney, Wendy Richman and Michael Nicholas. Stylistically, there is little dissimilar to the pairings, all featuring the same spare, lean textures of many of this composer's pieces (and, indeed, Icelandic music generally); yet other works compel attention. The opening piano solo *Scape* (2011), with its Cowell-like sonorities playing directly on the strings (riveting rendered here by Cory Smythe), is one such, as is *Sequences* (2016) – my favourite track, a quartet for the unlikely combination of bass flute, bass clarinet, baritone saxophone and contrabassoon.

The two larger ensemble pieces – *Aequilibria* (2014) and *Illumine* for eight strings (2016) – certainly conjure up and maintain distinctive tonal and expressive landscapes, holding the balance nicely between content and instrumental texture. At times, the desire for unusual sonorities seems to get the better of the message, but Thorvaldsdottir's music is never less than fascinating. Sono Luminus's sound is first-rate, allowing every flick of the strings and click of the percussion to be heard with crystalline precision.

Guy Rickards

Reflections – comparative version: Nordic Affect (2/19) (SONO) DSL92224

'Salut d'amour'

Brahms Contemplation (Wie Melodien zieht es mir, Op 105 No 1) **Dvořák** Songs My Mother Taught Me, Op 55 B104 No 4 **Elgar** Salut d'amour, Op 12 **Ernst** Variations on 'The Last Rose of Summer' **Falla** La vida breve - Danse espagnole **Grasse** Wellenspiel **Kreisler** La gitana. Tambourin chinois, Op 3 **Milstein** Paganiniana **Rachmaninov** Vocalise, Op 34 No 14 **Sarasate** Introduction and Tarantella, Op 43 **Tchaikovsky** Souvenir d'un lieu cher, Op 42 - No 3, Mélodie **Wieniawski** Scherzo-tarantelle, Op 16 **Sueye Park** vn Love Derwinger pf BIS (F) BIS2382 (59' • DDD/DSD)



It's interesting quite how many recording tributes to the late 19th and early 20th century's great violinists have been appearing of late from today's younger generation. In the space of six months we've had Ray Chen's 'The Golden Age' (Decca, 9/18), Elena Urioste's 'Estrellita' (BIS), Vilde Frang's Enescu Octet (Warner Classics, 10/18) and Emmanuel Bach's 'Musical Mosaics' (Willowhayne). In addition, despite the oft-heard lament that the string players of recent decades create a less immediately recognisable sound than the likes of Heifetz and Milstein, the offerings from Chen, Urioste and Frang display lashings of individual character.

Sueye Park's recital of vignettes thoroughly fits this mould of individuality, too, and if I were to sum up the special quality she brings then it would be her purity and directness. Take the Elgar title-piece, which comes without a hint of whimsy, coquettishness or vulnerability but is instead unfussily cloudless, singing and rubato-light. Or the pure, sure tone with which she sails into her programme opener of Sarasate's *Introduction et Tarantelle*, before moving into a Tarantella whose consecutive double-stops are weighted to perfection between strings as well as against each other, and where beauty of tone holds true even through its highest-register fast passagework.

In fact, sticking with what Park delivers way up the leger-line ladder, zip to the recital's penultimate *Die letzte Rose* from Paganini's contemporary fan and rival, the violinist-composer Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst. First, because the rounded, ringing sweetness she brings to Variation 2's sky-high melodic line is stunning; and also because of the dynamic distinction she gets between Var 4's left-hand pizzicato melody and its bowed broken-chordal accompaniment. Most of all, though, listen to the coda: double-stopped harmonics delivered with a tonal quality that's almost more akin to the notes produced by running a wet finger over a crystal glass than to horsehair meeting wound metal, contrasted by the intervening down-bows and runs. It's strikingly fine. As indeed is Love Derwinger's fused partnering throughout. In short, I'm properly taken with this one.

Charlotte Gardner

'Songs of the Cello'

'Homage to Pablo Casals'
JS Bach Solo Cello Suite No 1, BWV1007
Beethoven Cello Sonata No 3, Op 69 **Rubinstein** Melody, Op 3 No 1 (arr Popper) **Schubert** An die Musik, D547 **Schumann** Träumerei, Op 15 No 7 (arr Trinkaus). Widmung, Op 25 No 1 **Traditional** El cant dels ocells (arr Casals)
Taeguk Mun vc **Chi-ho Han** pf Warner Classics (F) 9029 56331-3 (59' • DDD)



'Homage to Pablo Casals' is this disc's subtitle, and there's nothing like setting yourself a high standard. It's a sort of showreel for the young South Korean-born cellist Taeguk Mun. Major works by Bach and Beethoven are followed by a string of brief encores, all of them, presumably, chosen because they were in Casals's repertoire. Mun's CV, which includes first place in the 2014 Casals Competition and the 2016 János Starker Foundation Award, suggests that he should be well worth hearing.

On the strength of this recital, he certainly is. Bach's First Suite can tell you a lot about a cellist. Immediately evident is Mun's transparent, unforced tone and what you might call a polished-walnut sound quality: refined, sweet and nuanced at the top, warm and clear at the bottom. His approach to the Bach is unfussy but never unthoughtful, combining historically informed clarity with light touches of vibrato and a way of tugging at a corner or climax that's just sufficient to emphasise the form.

I wouldn't say it danced, exactly, and his Beethoven too is (on balance) lyrical rather than dramatic: enhanced by the lucid, alert piano-playing of Chi-ho Han. Mun yields primacy to Han in the central Scherzo and the two really sparkle in the final Rondo. But, overall, this felt like a relaxed approach, as well it might be given Mun's evident mastery. The shorter pieces reinforced that impression, until with Casals's *El cant dels ocells* one senses something more – a certain intensity, and an emotional commitment that the rest of the disc only implies. This is a beautiful and accomplished programme from (clearly) a very fine cellist. Now I'd like to hear him take some risks. **Richard Bratby**

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Bernard Haitink

The Dutch conductor has achieved a great deal in his long career, and this continues even as he turns 90. David Gutman pays tribute to the modest maestro and his work

Bernard Haitink is much given to self-deprecation. Persuaded to fill a four-year gap between showier music directors at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, he observed that 'every conductor, including myself, has a sell-by date', and settled for the unassuming tag of 'principal conductor': 'I never enjoyed power.'

Might this diffident doyen of his profession risk being taken for granted? Not so in Britain, where he forged durable relationships to complement his long stint at the Concertgebouw Orchestra and was made honorary KBE in 1977 and Companion of Honour in 2002. Formal recognition has come also from the country of his birth – not that he thinks of himself nowadays as significantly Dutch: there have been lacunae in his Amsterdam engagement diary.

For players, if not administrators, he is always, everywhere, 'one of us'. 'It's very important that the musicians trust you,' he says, 'that they know, when the hour comes, you will stand [up] for them.' Today, the LSO is his 'unofficial' London base while he maintains musical connections in Berlin, Vienna, Chicago, Munich and Lucerne. Not bad for a reluctant jet-setter.

Haitink (born in Amsterdam, March 4, 1929) began as a rank-and-file violinist and has suggested that his subsequent career owed much to the elimination of bigger talents in the Holocaust. If his verbal reticence in rehearsal stems partly from shyness, he knows too that players generally prefer leadership expressed through unambiguous gesture. Haitink's performances convey a strength and conviction born of collaboration. Not one to focus on the replication of interpretative quirks inscribed on a yellowing score, he has spoken of the buzz he gets from perusing a pristine copy of a familiar work. Even a standard miniature score can feel 'totally fresh'. Jonathan Del Mar's

Bärenreiter editions encouraged the friskier approach and reappraised tempo relationships of his Beethoven symphonies for LSO Live. Is this respect – or literalism? There's no mistaking the lasting impact of the repertoire choices made by Willem Mengelberg, pre-eminent Dutch maestro of Haitink's boyhood, yet no trace of his interpretative speed bumps.

Haitink's mysterious ability to make a rendition sound inexorably 'right' while allowing space for individual creativity has made him a sought-after accompanist. He appeared in this role on his first internationally distributed LP, directing the

Concertgebouw Orchestra for Arthur Grumiaux's Mendelssohn and Tchaikovsky violin concertos (Philips, 3/61). In late career, Haitink is chiefly associated with a smaller, not exclusively Austro-German, clutch of orchestral masterpieces. Physical frailty, apparent in occasionally hazardous descents from the podium, has not been perceptible in his music-making: the stick technique remains assured and economical, the line unblinkingly direct. An approach once criticised as risk-averse has come to exemplify old-school integrity.

Although Haitink achieves surprising transparency in Debussy (possibly reflecting The Netherlands' geographical position between French and German musical worlds), surveys of Bruckner and Mahler (Philips, 9/73 and 9/72) have been career-defining. The

classical understatement which once persuaded doubters has more recently darkened into something less 'central'. In Mahler's Third, monumental rather than histrionic, neither plush nor shrill, the finale still elicits tears, including Haitink's own (BR-Klassik, 8/17). His traditional three-movement Bruckner Ninth is now uncompromisingly bleak, no transition falsely emotive (LSO Live, 4/14). 'Not so holy,' was his advice to one over-reverent student maestro embarking on the Seventh.

The stick technique remains assured – an approach once criticised as risk-averse now exemplifies old-school integrity

DEFINING MOMENTS

• 1954 – *Conducting debut aged 25*

Conducts his first concert, on July 19 with Netherlands Radio PO, which he initially joined as violinist. His conducting there is nurtured by Ferdinand Leitner. Becomes Chief Conductor in 1957.

• 1956 – *Concertgebouw Orchestra debut*

A late stand-in for Carlo Maria Giulini on November 7. Becomes the youngest ever Principal Conductor of the orchestra in 1961, initially sharing the position with Eugen Jochum, latterly in sole charge till 1988.

• 1967 – *Regular associations with English institutions begin*

Becomes Principal Conductor and Artistic Adviser (artistic director from 1970) of the London Philharmonic, till 1979. From 1977 to 1987: Music Director at Glyndebourne, where he made his UK opera debut in 1972.

• 1987 – *Last long-term appointment begins: Covent Garden*

Music Director of the Royal Opera until 2002. It's a period of existential crisis and physical transformation for the cash-strapped house. Subsequent formal appointments are more in the nature of luxury stopgaps.

• 2015 – *Gramophone Lifetime Achievement Award*

Acclaim continues in 2017 as is appointed Commander of the Order of the Netherlands Lion, the country's oldest and most exclusive public honour.



Haitink's Shostakovich has comparable sobriety, unaffected by extramusical static, devoid of spin. It was during his association with the LPO that he began recording the symphonies for Decca. There followed a swathe of British repertoire for EMI. Typically, even when confessing not to have understood the Ninth, Haitink saw his slow-building Vaughan Williams symphony cycle through to a dignified end (EMI, 5/01). The early Concertgebouw years reveal wider sympathies too.

Recently reissued (on Decca Eloquence) is Hendrik Andriessen's *Symphonic Etude* (1952), a rarity from an early 'local' release, recorded in 1960.

In mid-career, Haitink focused on opera. His bond with Glyndebourne saw him conduct the opening of the new house in May 1994, Gerald Finley heading the cast of Mozart's *Le nozze di*

Figaro (NVC Arts, 1/00). Crises at Covent Garden were not primarily musical. Extending his repertoire with Tippett's *A Midsummer Marriage* and Janáček's *Jenůfa* (Erato, 3/03), Haitink won plaudits for his Wagner despite antipathy to Richard Jones's 'cartoonish' productions. A recorded *Ring* was made (prematurely?) with Bavarian Radio forces (EMI, 12/89, 12/88, 11/91, 9/92). In London he remained doggedly supportive of the orchestral musicians of the Royal Opera in the face of press criticism and serious ill health.

Haitink once decried the endless duplication of standard repertoire on disc. That he should be ending his career contributing to the glut may seem paradoxical, but his best remakes retain enviable freshness and humanity to balance all that iconic solidity and realism. **G**

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Bruckner
Symphony No 6
Bavarian Radio
Symphony
Orchestra /
Haitink
BR-Klassik (2/18)

Instrumental



Jeremy Nicholas is impressed by Eugen Indjc's Chopin:
'Here is mature Chopin-playing, with no eccentric musical decisions that have you diving for the score' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 63**



Michelle Assay enjoys Scriabin's Preludes from Dmitri Alexeev:
'Giving the music its due quota of caprice and volatility, Alexeev conveys an overall impression of humane dignity' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 66**

JS Bach

Six Solo Cello Suites, BWV1007-1012

Jiří Bárta vc

Animal Music/Supraphon Ⓜ ② ANI076-2
(143' • DDD)



Jiří Bárta is his own closest rival here, his earlier Supraphon recording vying with this Animal Music remake. The two versions are fairly similar, though sitting uncomfortably through the occasionally awkward fast Courantes on the Baroque cello had me imagining that things must have been quite different back in the 1990s. As it happens I was quite wrong. In terms of the tempo, say of the Courante from the Second Suite, the two performances are virtually identical – but the process of comparing does reveal greater fluency and bite on the earlier version. Listening to the two accounts of the Gigue from the same Suite finds Bárta marginally broadening the pace in this newer option but more significant is that the earlier account is more keenly pointed, more responsive to the music's potential for tonal colouring. Then again, the Allemande from the Sixth Suite is rapturously beautiful on this new version, marginally more so than before, though the pitch isn't quite so secure, while the Sarabande from the Fifth Suite has significantly picked up the pace. Still, here I prefer the quietly conversational manner of Pieter Wispelwey.

Toing and froing between the two Bárta sets reveals, quite aside from the differences inherent between a Baroque cello (Animal Music) and a more modern instrument (Supraphon), a darkening of texture on this newer version and a reining-in of expressive variety. These and other differences pose the question: is the adoption of 'period' manners always a good thing? Years ago the same question occurred to me when I compared the 'old' Viktoria Mullova with her more recent (ie 'historically informed') self in the First

Solo Violin Partita. Babies and bathwater spring to mind, though there are cases where a stylistic switch can reveal stimulating revelations on both sides of the fence, cellist Julius Berger on *Orfeo* and Wergo being a fair case in point.

By chance I'd just been listening to Daniil Shafran's newly reissued Melodiya set of the Suites, vibrant and audacious almost to a fault, so Bárta's gentler quirks rather paled by comparison. Given a choice, I'd stay with his earlier Supraphon recording but this period-instrument 'new look' is a quality act, if not quite on a par with Anner Bylsma (Sony Classical, 1/93), Yo-Yo Ma's latest version (Sony Classical, A/18), the best of Steven Isserlis (Hyperion, 7/07) or the ever-inventive Wispelwey's third recording (Evil Penguin, 12/12). The recordings here are good, though what sounds like the percussive knocking of fingers on the neck of the instrument is fairly prominent. **Rob Cowan**

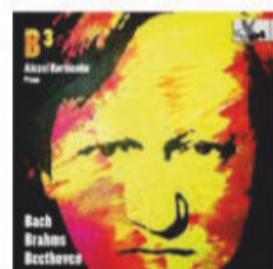
JS Bach • Beethoven • Brahms

JS Bach Keyboard Partita No 6, BWV830

Beethoven Piano Sonata No 8, 'Pathétique', Op 13 **Brahms** Piano Pieces - Op 76 No 7; Op 116 No 4; Op 118 No 2; Op 119 No 1

Alexei Kornienko pf

TYXart Ⓜ TXA18118 (69' • DDD)



Listening to Alexei Kornienko play Bach is like stumbling into a time warp. His hyper-romanticised approach, uprooted from cultural and historical context, arbitrarily presses notes on the page into service for all manner of personal utterance. In the case of this E minor Partita, the expressive devices employed would seem more appropriate in Chopin, Scriabin or Czerny.

Armed with the knowledge that this degree of ahistorical Bach persists in certain quarters, one ventures toward the *Grande sonate pathétique*, confident that, stylistically speaking, a work

composed a mere two and a quarter centuries ago will land us, not on the same page perhaps, but at least within the covers of the same book. If occasions for disagreement about interpretative choices are plentiful in the *Pathétique*, this is at least recognisably Beethoven, albeit of a particularly Russian stamp. The overabundance of foregrounded details is meant, no doubt, to bolster the impression of a deeply personal interpretation. In terms of piano-playing *per se*, the performance exhibits varied and precise articulation, as well as healthy tone production, which contribute to the sonata's highly burnished surfaces. An extraordinary degree of calculation, combined with generally moribund tempos, renders the four little Brahms pieces less than convincing.

Style in music, as in theatre and dance, is constantly evolving, a process in which each generation reconceives the canon on its own terms, ideally in light of historical investigation, with imaginative insight and a minimum of egocentricity. The interest in this recording is perhaps the example it provides of insular imperviousness to influence. **Patrick Rucker**

Brahms

Four Ballades, Op 10.

Piano Pieces - Op 76; Op 117

Fabian Müller pf

Berlin Classics Ⓜ 0301155BC (69' • DDD)

Brahms

'Stolen Moments'

JS Bach/Brahms Chaconne **Brahms** Hungarian Dances - No 1; No 4. Intermezzo, Op 116 No 2. Piano Pieces, Op 76. Variations on a Hungarian Song, Op 21 No 2

Rikke Sandberg pf

Danacord Ⓜ DACOCD835 (72' • DDD)





Period manners: Jiří Bárta revisits Bach's Cello Suites on a Baroque instrument

The young Bonn native Fabian Müller has captured laurels at competitions in Frankfurt, Bolzano and Munich. His debut recording, which included music of Ravel, Bartók, Messiaen and Beethoven, was released in 2016 (ARS Produktion). His second disc, devoted entirely to Brahms, is both satisfying and artistically distinctive, suggesting that Müller is a pianist worth keeping an eye on.

He begins with the Op 10 Ballades, as difficult to pull off as the opener of a CD as they are of a recital. But from the beginning, a richly atmospheric sound, beautiful chord-voicing and a genuine sense of an ominous tale unfolding alerts us to something special at work here. As the pieces progress, it becomes evident that, by scrupulous observance of Brahms's dynamic, articulation and pedal markings, Müller is able to achieve shapely formal contours, avoiding the fragmentation to which these pieces often fall prey. He is also able to tease out astonishingly varied textures from the composer's slavishly chord-bound figurations.

These qualities blossom and pollinate the more succinct and contrasted Eight Pieces, Op 76, creating in each a miniature lyrical or dramatic gestalt. The ubiquitous

B minor Capriccio, perhaps the first small Brahms piece to enter the repertory and played by everybody, sounds less whimsically mincing than slightly sinister, thanks to Müller's deft applications of subtle rubato to an inerrant sense of momentum. The subsequent A flat Intermezzo floats a luxuriant legato above what could be a delicate string pizzicato accompaniment. In an interesting take on the B flat Intermezzo, the shuddering thirds that close the first section are transformed into shivers of delight by the end. The jaunty C sharp minor Capriccio, with all its cross-rhythmic stresses, makes its bumptious way with a refreshingly light step. This is the sort of boldly original, heartfelt Brahms-playing that leaves one hungry for more.

The Danish pianist Rikke Sandberg, despite her interesting and varied Brahms programme for Danacord, falls somewhat short of the high benchmark set by Müller. Her fearlessly uncompromising Bach D minor Chaconne surely fulfils Brahms's intention in arranging the piece for left hand alone to convey some sense of its challenges for the solo violin. Her abstemious use of the pedal heightens the similarity to Bach's original. She

is less successful in the challenging *Variations on a Hungarian Song*, which seem directionless, and a lavishly applied rubato impairs the two *Hungarian Dances*.

Sandberg too gives us the full Op 76 but from an entirely different point of view. Here rhythmical ambivalence again asserts itself, with a tendency to dwell on the first beat of the bar and on the beginning of phrases, rendering many of the pieces static and obscuring contours. **Patrick Rucker**

Brahms · Schumann

Brahms Piano Pieces – Op 117; Op 118

Schumann Papillons, Op 2. Kinderszenen, Op 15

Sarah Beth Briggs pf

Avie F AV2398 (81' • DDD)



The British pianist Sarah Beth Briggs bookends her recital with Schumann, launching the disc with *Papillons* and ending with *Kinderszenen*. Though she is not blessed with the most beautiful of Steinways, with a tendency for harshness in its upper register, she clearly has affection for everything she plays. The

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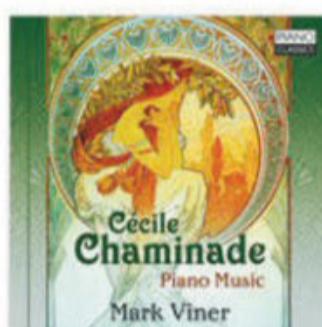
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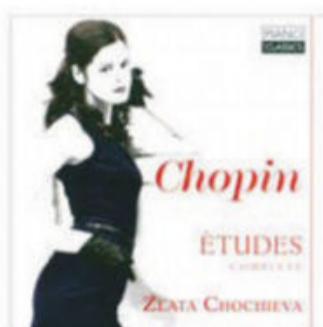
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Zlata Chochieva
1CD PCL0068



Nicolas Stavy is the latest pianist to turn his attention to the underrated piano music of Gabriel Fauré – see review on page 64

problem is that in the slower music that can become unsubtly realised – the very opening of *Papillons* is too deliberate, as is *Kinderszenen*'s 'Pleading Child' and 'Träumerei'. In 'A Curious Story' she finds none of the glee of, say, Pires, sounding curiously underpowered. Happily, things liven up in the subsequent game of 'Blind Man's Buff'. But her Knight has a much safer time on his hobby horse than Hamelin's (who, one hopes, was equipped with a crash helmet, so recklessly fast is it, though unquestionably thrilling). And that sense of playing it safe also makes the faster moments in *Papillons* somewhat tame – the *fortissimo* octaves in No 8, for instance, sound overly laboured, with an over-reliance on rubato in the phrases that follow. No 10, marked *Vivo*, is also terribly timid (just a few moments spent with Hamelin are altogether more compelling). Things improve slightly in the finale of *Papillons* but it's really too little, too late.

In between the Schumann comes late Brahms. The opening of Op 117 is thoughtfully done but you don't need to turn to Volodos to realise that Briggs doesn't really sing a line – Jonathan Plowright takes a slightly faster tempo and immediately sounds more comfortable. I do like the quiet unease

that Briggs finds in the second of the set, and the third starts promisingly, though in the high-lying moments of the middle section she is hampered by that uningratiating piano sound. And that also afflicts Op 118 No 2, which sounds thin-toned compared with Plowright and co.

Harriet Smith

Kinderszenen – selected comparisons:

Pires (4/85^R) (APEX) 2564 60363-2

Hamelin (6/14) (HYPE) CDA68030

Papillons – selected comparisons:

Hamelin (1/06) (HYPE) CDA67120

Brahms Opp 117 & 118 – selected comparisons:

Volodos (6/17) (SONY) 88875 13019-2

Brahms Op 117 – selected comparisons:

Plowright (12/14) (BIS) BIS2117

Brahms Op 118 – selected comparisons:

Plowright (2/16) (BIS) BIS2127

Chopin

Piano Sonatas - No 2, Op 35; No 3, Op 58.

Nocturne No 13, Op 48 No 1

Eugen Indjic *pf*

Dux ® DUX1180 (55' • DDD)



The prospect of another recording of Chopin's two most popular piano

sonatas does not necessarily fill one with 'a running stream of sparkling joy'. One website lists 351 recordings of the 'Funeral March' Sonata currently available and 308 of the B minor. Who will opt for this recording by a pianist now in his early seventies who has had a respectable but far from high-profile career?

Well, in answer to that question, quite a few, I hope. From the opening measures of the Second Sonata you know you are listening to a master pianist, drawn into the burnished, silky-smooth tone Eugen Indjic produces, noting with pleasure his scrupulous phrasing of the first subject (to wit a slight accent on the first quaver but, when it returns some 26 bars later, transferred to the second quaver as marked). Here is mature Chopin-playing, no young blood stamping his or her personality on the score with eccentric or idiosyncratic musical decisions that have you diving for the score. One quickly settles back, knowing this account of the sonata will be a joy to hear – and so it proves, the only controversial point being the first-subject repeat which Indjic takes from the *doppio movimento* bar; he also eschews the first-movement repeat in the B minor Sonata (both of which options I personally favour).

It is rare to hear either sonata played with such consistently transparent part-

playing in both hands, such that it allows us to hear every note and contrapuntal figure that Chopin took so much trouble to notate but which are frequently overlooked, especially in faster passages such as the finale of the 'Funeral' Sonata. Yes, there have been more superficially exciting accounts of this and the finale of the B minor Sonata but Indjic plays these with an expressive power that generates its own thrill.

Between the two sonatas comes a performance of the great C minor Nocturne which will live in the memory. As will now be clear, I was unexpectedly bowled over by this disc. But then I remembered that it was Indjic's recording of Chopin mazurkas that was used by the late William Barrington-Coupe to add to the faked discography of his wife Joyce Hatto, providing, if somewhat ironically, confirmation of Eugen Indjic's credentials as a very fine Chopin player.

Jeremy Nicholas

Fauré

Complete Nocturnes

Eric Le Sage *pf*

Alpha  ALPHA414 (72' • DDD)

Fauré

Ballade, Op 19. Mazurka. Nocturnes - No 1, Op 33 No 1; No 6, Op 63; No 13, Op 119. Romance sans paroles, Op 17. Sonate

Nicolas Stavy *pf*

BIS  BIS2389 (59' • DDD/DSD)



Two new discs, by Eric Le Sage on Alpha Classics and Nicolas Stavy on BIS, add further testimony that Gabriel Fauré, universally recognised as a master of the chanson and chamber music, but whose piano music has been historically neglected outside France, should be regarded as an important master of the instrument. Le Sage, among whose extensive discography is a traversal of Fauré's chamber music, presents all 13 Nocturnes, while Stavy's recital includes two early works previously unrecorded.

It is a pleasure to hear Fauré's Nocturnes, lyrical pieces described by his son, Philippe Fauré-Fremiet, as evoking 'the secret communion of humanity and things invisible', presented chronologically as a set. Le Sage's ample arsenal of touch and release strategies and his infinitely calibrated dynamic spectrum reveal nuances of

textural richness inherent in this intimate repertory. Replete though the Nocturnes may be with sentiment, Le Sage's sensibility never courts sentimentality.

The emotional variety of these pieces is vividly portrayed. The mysterious, almost sinister darkness of the E flat minor of Op 33 is completely dispelled by the two subsequent extrovert companion pieces. The sheer virtuosity with which the Fifth Nocturne overflows, far from being exhibitionist, is inextricable from its emotional abundance. The means, here as elsewhere, is perfectly tailored to suit the end. The mercurial emotions of the Seventh Nocturne are beautifully wrought, while the despair of the Thirteenth cuts close to the bone. These are loving interpretations by an artist who has made Fauré's intimate and complex language his own.

Stavy's disc has the added interest of works that will be published as part of the Bärenreiter critical edition but which have not been heard on record before. Both the early *Sonate*, written as a teaching piece for Fauré's niece, and the *Mazurka*, are clearly the products of a young composer, yet hint at aspects of the mature master. Stavy is particularly persuasive in the large-scale *Ballade*, dedicated to Saint-Saëns, Fauré's beloved teacher.

With traversals of Fauré's piano music by Louis Lortie (Chandos) and Jean-Claude Pennetier (Mirare) either complete or under way, and recent fine single releases by Hannes Minnaar (Challenge Classics, 2/17) and Michel Dalberto (Aparté, A/17), not to mention the excellent discs reviewed here, is it safe to say a full-scale renaissance of the French master is in full flower?

Patrick Rucker

Haydn

Piano Sonatas - HobXVI:6; HobXVI:20; HobXVI:48. Sonata (Un piccolo divertimento), HobXVII:6. Variations on 'Gott erhalte Franz, den Kaiser'

Kristian Bezuidenhout *pf*

Harmonia Mundi  HMM90 2273 (68' • DDD)



There's a strange feeling of something like alienation or distance at the outset of Kristian Bezuidenhout's Haydn recital. Perhaps it's because he opens with the uneasy sound world of the C minor Sonata (No 20) rather than one of the composer's more upbeat keyboard pieces. The sensation is only fleeting, however, and soon the listener is drawn in by the

myriad subtleties of Bezuidenhout's playing and by the glorious sounds he draws from his instrument – by the doyen of historical instrument makers, Paul McNulty, based on an Anton Walter (Vienna) from the end of Haydn's life. Soon you're hanging on every note of this sequence that seems to travel from darkness to darkness, closing with the F minor Variations – the *Piccolo divertimento* that is anything but *piccolo*.

The rarefied opening of the C minor Sonata seems to be not quite of this world until the texture thickens and the full range of the instrument is revealed. The bass especially, although used sparingly in this music, has both clarity and 'grunt', able to punctuate when required but never becoming muddy in left-hand chords. Quiet playing draws a gentle veil over the sound, while the damper pedal extends the repertoire of soft tones available – and never becomes an effect for its own sake when used as judiciously as here.

Most important, though, is Bezuidenhout's playing itself. Technique is obviously not an issue: arpeggios spray notes like Eszterháza fountains; Haydn's triplet accompaniments are never simply 'typed' but come alive with gradations of pressure that always seem instinctive rather than simply applied. Decoration, too, is sparing rather than trowelled on. This is the very opposite of 'look-at-me' pianism.

There is the merest hint of action noise and the pianist's breathing is faintly audible (most noticeably on headphones). But why not? The fortepiano is an instrument with inherent limitations, within which Haydn and his players had to work, and this is living and breathing music. You're left in no doubt of that by the end of this compelling, tantalising recital. Those allergic to period pianos will cleave to Bavouzet (Chandos) among current Haydn cycles. Others will find Bezuidenhout a mesmerising guide to the composer's keyboard world. **David Threasher**

Mussorgsky · Rachmaninov

Mussorgsky Pictures at an Exhibition

Rachmaninov Six Moments musicaux, Op 16

Jean-Philippe Collard *pf*

La Dolce Volta  LDV45 (65' • DDD)



Collectors familiar with Jean-Philippe Collard's excellent EMI Rachmaninov recordings will be pleased to see the pianist return to the composer. Collard shares with

his erstwhile associate Vladimir Horowitz the gift for shaping Rachmaninov's labyrinthine lines to three-dimensional effect while, at the same time, bringing an incisive edge to rapid passagework that casts the thick textures in a gaunt, acerbic light. Take the second of the *Moments musicaux*, for example, where Collard's melodic tapering is offset by the heightened left-hand clarity. The 'Dies irae'-inspired No 3 emerges more colourfully and dynamically generous compared to Collard's earlier EMI traversal, but that may be due to La Dolce Volta's more robust recorded sound. While the pianist captures the full measure of the Fourth and Sixth selections' swirling bravura, he seems more emotionally connected to No 5's lyrical deliberation.

According to the booklet notes, Collard resists the temptation to emend the plain-spoken yet effective piano-writing in Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Yet time and again he pulls focus from the gravitas of the composer's steady tempos by imposing tiny tenutos or by pushing a phrase ahead in minuscule increments. As a result, the cumulative impact of the assymetrical phrase lengths of the 'Promenades' slackens, as does the hypnotic pull of repeated-note ostinatos of 'The Old Castle' or the steady and

relentlessly grinding accompaniment in ‘Bydło’. Why the *affettuoso* approach to the fourth ‘Promenade’ or the low-energy ‘Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuÿle’? The ‘Limoges’ marketplace customers amble about on cruise control, rather than bustle with nervous energy à la Yefim Bronfman, Vladimir Ashkenazy and Sviatoslav Richter. However, Collard plays the final two movements full-out, giving in to Viktor Hartmann’s powerful imagery through fulfillingly sonorous means. If only the rest of the performance had been on this level! As usual, La Dolce Volta offers multilingual annotations and lavish graphics. **Jed Distler**

Schubert · Weber

Schubert Piano Sonata No 9, D575

Weber Piano Sonata No 2, Op 39

Paul Lewis *pf*

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2324 (58' • DDD)



Lewis

Lewis

A black and white portrait of Paul Lewis, showing him from the chest up. He has dark, curly hair and is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. He is wearing a dark, high-collared jacket.

This latest instalment in Paul Lewis's Schubert pilgrimage certainly enhances his reputation. It is, as always, intelligently paced and shaped, not needing to shout its credentials, but shaping

contours and pacing contrasts as though accompanying unstated song texts. He has a particularly fine sense for how the music travels – be it towards some goal, into the unknown, or resting at a way-station to enjoy and reflect on experience. Admittedly the treble sound is a little on the glassy side (throughout the disc in fact). If pushed I would prefer Brendel's (on this occasion) mellower sound and, in the main theme of the first movement and elsewhere, less hiccupy staccatos. However, turning for comparison to Uchida shows her, again on this occasion, the more tempted into over-dramatisation. This is a matter of taste, perhaps, but if nothing else the powerful sense of self-belief Lewis radiates places him squarely in the august company of those leading modern-day Schubertians.

And what a welcome coupling is the Weber Second Sonata, composed in 1816, just a year before the Schubert, and already looking ahead to the poetic world of Chopin's concertos. True, the instant gratification and rhetorical immediacy Weber offers doesn't give him access to the deeper regions plumbbed by Schubert. But on the other hand, there is a delectable sense of improvisatory freedom in the sonata's unfolding, notwithstanding the standard four-movement layout, and while the finale is rather more predictable and

repetitive than the first movement, it is so in an irresistibly charming way. It's not hard to see why the likes of Cortot, Dino Ciani and Gilels should all have thought the piece worth their while recording (all still available, by the way), and once again Lewis is fully worthy of such comparisons. He shows himself entirely at one with the idiom: supplely inflecting every line without straying into affected floridity, tastefully elevating the music as high as it will comfortably go without ever putting excessive dramatic freight on it. Fine recording quality, despite that slight glassiness in the treble. **David Fanning**

Schubert – selected comparisons:

Uchida (2/00^R) (DECC) 475 6282DB8

Brendel (3/01) (PHIL) 456 573-2PM2

Scriabin

Complete Preludes

Dmitri Alexeev pf

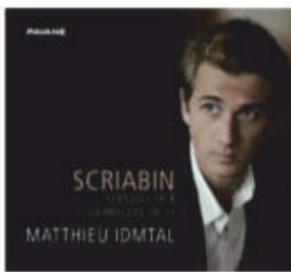
Brilliant Classics ⑤ ② 95651 (121' • DDD)

Scriabin

Études, Op 8. Preludes, Op 11

Matthieu Idmtal pf

Pavane ⑤ ADW7588 (78' • DDD)



The Russian piano prelude owes almost as much to Scriabin as it does to Rachmaninov: numerically speaking, in fact, even more. Scriabin's 90 examples cover his entire career, providing snapshots of an evolving musical language from affectionate obeisances to Chopin all the way to post-tonal apocalyptic visions. The transitions, as Alexeev's survey of these miracle miniatures persuasively reveals, are surprisingly seamless. In fact the rupture with tonality is so gradual that it is only in the 1910 Prelude from the *Two Morceaux*, Op 59, that the 'lightness of being' typical of Scriabin's 'late' period fully registers. If the early preludes are short poems, the later ones are open-ended sentences, until gradually punctuation marks dissolve into thin air.

In this third instalment in his survey of Scriabin's complete piano works, Alexeev's temperamental affinity once again comes paired with sovereign command of colours and intonations (in the Russian sense of musical eloquence). Giving the music its due quota of caprice and volatility, he never deviates into aggression or superficiality, conveying instead an overall impression of humane

dignity and a powerful sense of journey. Piers Lane's highly regarded complete Preludes are the obvious modern comparison. But take, for instance, the intimate, melancholic and deceptively simple Op 16 No 4 (1895), where Alexeev subtly speaks and sighs through every note, leaving Lane sounding under-inflected and over-literal.

Allowance needs to be made for some tinniness in the piano's high treble. And Alexeev is quite a grunter (but then Lane is almost as conspicuously a heavy breather). There is also one controversial detail in Alexeev's depiction of Scriabin's last completed work, Op 74 No 2, where he takes the indication *très lent, contemplatif* more to heart than any other performer I have heard. This undoubtedly helps him to showcase his remarkable tonal control and subtlety of voicing, and it chimes with Scriabin's reported description of this prelude as depicting 'fatigue, exhaustion ... for all eternity, for millions of years ...'. Still, Alexeev's decision to repeat the entire piece may raise eyebrows: I wonder whether it has some sanction or is just a personal initiative.

Matthieu Idmtal's Op 8 Études and Op 11 Preludes are grunt-free but the over-resonant recording makes it hard to hear much of anything clearly. Idmtal is evidently technically well endowed and able to tame all the fiery dragons of the Études. He is also possessed of a sensitive soul. Over-sensitive, perhaps, because his habitual pushing and pulling of the lines tips some of these pieces over into the world of French salon music: more affected than effective, in short. The Pavane disc offers no biographical note and forgets to list track numbers in the booklet.

Michelle Assay

Preludes – selected comparison:

Lane (5/01^R) (HYPE) CDH55450/51 (oas)

Jorge Bolet

'Berlin Radio Recordings, Vol 3'

Beethoven Piano Concerto No 5,

'Emperor', Op 73^a **Chopin** Études, Op 25.

Fantaisie-imromptu, Op 66. Andante spianato and Grande Polonaise brillante, Op 22.

Polonaises - No 3, 'Military', Op 40 No 1; No 4, Op 40 No 2; No 6, 'Heroic', Op 53 **Debussy**

Images - Book 2. **Masques** **Dello Joio** Piano Sonata No 2 **Franck** Prélude, Aria et Final

Godowsky Symphonic Metamorphosis on Die Fledermaus **Grieg** Ballade, Op 24 **Schumann** Frühlingsnacht, Op 39 No 12 (arr Liszt, S568).

Piano Sonata No 3, Op 14

Jorge Bolet pf^a **Berlin Radio Symphony**

Orchestra / Moshe Atzmon

Audite ⑤ ③ AUDITE21 459 (3h 44' • ADD)

Recorded 1961-74



According to Audite's booklet, this is the final volume of Bolet's (West) Berlin recordings made between 1961 and 1974. The two earlier volumes featured RIAS recordings (12/17, 4/18). This third collection has those made by Sender Freies Berlin (Radio Free Berlin), the public radio and television service for West Berlin from 1954 until 1990. The sound quality throughout is amazingly good.

Bolet's legions of fans will need no words of encouragement from me to invest, for there are several valuable additions to this great pianist's discography. Not least among them is a superb live performance of the *Emperor* Concerto, boasting an especially exuberant and forthright finale, captured (uniquely in this set) in 1974 by ORTF in Paris. Preceding that are the complete Chopin Op 25 Etudes from 1968, full of delectable things, bold, confident and paraded in Bolet's wonderful range of touch and colours, among them the cello-like plangency of No 7 and the fire and brimstone of No 11 (a breathtaking 'Winter Wind'). If No 9 is more kangaroo than 'Butterfly', it will surely put a smile on your face. There are also three of Chopin's Polonaises (Nos 3, 4 and 6) that are new to the discography.

Debussy is a composer who one does not normally associate with Bolet. Perhaps hearing him in *Images* Book 2 and *Masques* (both from 1961) will change perceptions. On the other hand, as one of the piano's great tone colourists, maybe we shouldn't be surprised. If there is a surprise to be had it is that he was drawn to Norman Dello Joio's Piano Sonata No 2 of 1943 which, among other novelties, has a last movement in the unusual key of C flat major. Bolet revels in its harsh, expressionist effusion of rhythmic and technical challenges. Schumann is more familiar Bolet territory, though not his Piano Sonata No 3, the least played of the three (the so-called *Concerto Without Orchestra*). Given that Bolet was at his best in front of an audience, as with most of the recordings in this set, there is no sense of a studio performance, such as there was towards the end of his career. He makes a substantial (and in my view beneficial) cut in the finale.

Disc 2 has the Grieg Ballade, a piece with a particular Bolet association for this writer: on one memorable evening in the late 1970s after supper in my apartment with Bolet and some mutual friends, we



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www.animalmusic.cz



Radek Baborák/ Orquestrina

„A light, cheerful, yet artistically brilliant homage to dance rhythms. From Astor Piazzolla's tangos and colonial waltzes by Antonio Lauro to Ravel's Spanish rhythms in his Bolero... The essentials of this album are Baborák's exquisite performance, his refined, colourful tone, and the masterful arrangements.“ Tomáš S. Polívka, UNI

GRAMOPHONE Focus

LISZT AS ROMANTIC HERO

Patrick Rucker hears two fearless young pianists bring poetry and flair to Liszt's Transcendental Études



Andrey Gugnin plays Liszt with eloquence and imagination

Liszt

Études d'exécution transcendante, S139.

La legierezza, S144 No 2. Paraphrase de concert sur Rigoletto (Verdi), S434

Boris Giltburg pf

Naxos M 8 573981 (80' • DDD)

Liszt

Études d'exécution transcendante, S139

Andrey Gugnin pf

Piano Classics F PCL10158 (66' • DDD)



Today, when Liszt's 12 *Études d'exécution transcendante* seem almost a part of the landscape, with a couple of new recordings every year or so, it's surprising to realise that for most of the 20th century they were a genuine rarity. Pianists who played Liszt might have had one or two of the *Transcendentals* in their repertoires, though his *Paganini* Études were always the more popular.

Between 1956 and 1958, Alexander Borovsky, Gunnar Johansen and György Cziffra recorded the first complete sets of the *Transcendentals*. Thereafter the field gradually widened, with notable accounts by Berman, Kentner, Bolet, France Clidat, Russell Sherman and Arrau. From the mid-1990s, however,

a surprising number of young pianists chose to make their recording debuts with the *Transcendentals*, including impressive accounts by Claire-Marie Le Guay, Bertrand Chamayou, Alice Sara Ott and Mariangela Vocatello. More recently, the recordings of Daniil Trifonov and Kirill Gerstein have been particularly esteemed. Last year distinctive new versions of the *Transcendentals* were recorded by two pianists still in their early thirties: the Russian Andrey Gugnin and the Russian-born Israeli Boris Giltburg.

Giltburg needs no introduction. His series of warmly received recordings, particularly of Rachmaninov, not to mention his victory at the 2013 Queen Elisabeth, has secured him a deservedly prominent place on the map. Despite the considerable excitement at the prospect of his *Transcendentals*, I must confess a degree of disappointment.

From the 'Preludio' we are confronted with Giltburg's penchant for beginning figurations and phrases slowly, then gradually accelerating. This is of course a useful and characteristic agogic strategy but, as the Études unfold, Giltburg indulges it so frequently that it seriously undermines rhythmic stability and impedes the long line.

'Paysage', on the other hand, is meltingly lyrical, with compelling voice-leading and a beautiful *cantabile*. 'Feux follets' has all the delicate precision of a fine mechanical watch, exuding a feathery

lightness. 'Wilde Jagd' is remarkably crisp and 'Mazeppa' is a model of clarity. Yet the Lisztian recitatives, whether near the end of 'Mazeppa' or the introduction to 'Ricordanza', seem to lack the impetus of declamation and thus come off as oddly directionless. Elsewhere in 'Ricordanza', crescendos seem rigidly tied to accelerandos and, for all its *pianissimo* intimacy, repeated iterations in the étude strike as more desultory than ardent. As the series draws to a close with 'Harmonies du soir' and 'Chasse-neige' a certain guardedness seems to emerge, leaving the impression of a calculated caution that inhibits passion taking wing.

Less well known than Giltburg, Andrey Gugnin's credentials include prizes at the 2013 Beethoven Competition and the Gina Bachauer in 2014, leading up to the first prize in Sydney in 2016, in addition to not inconsiderable exposure on YouTube. Nevertheless, Gugnin's new disc is nothing short of disarming. This is some of the finest Liszt-playing one is likely to encounter these days, rich with affective contrasts, pliant and organic rubato, an exquisitely calibrated dynamic spectrum and a beguiling *cantabile* that speaks simply and directly.

The second Étude in A minor is taken at a true *molto vivace*, making the *prestissimo* midway through seem a shift into warp speed, all achieved with the utmost delicacy of touch and beautifully shaped phrases. Atmospheric mystery shrouds the beginning of 'Vision', rendering the turn to the major an apotheosis, grand and inevitable. Gugnin's inerrant rhythmic sense allows the straight-spined pride of 'Eroica' to strut with captivating swagger. 'Feux follets' runs like quicksilver in a sparkling equipoise of virtuosity and evocative conjury.

Gugnin's aural imagery is so fecund that one readily imagines the fierce hunting scenes of Delacroix in 'Wilde Jagd' or a Turner snow storm in 'Chasse-neige'. His spacious, unhurried 'Ricordanza' recalls ardent love with true nostalgic eloquence, while the opening bars of 'Harmonies du soir' suggest lengthening shadows at sunset. And this orchestrally conceived 'Mazeppa', better experienced than described, leaves no doubt that it was in fact the horse that died in the end, not the pianist.

Gugnin's cultivated *pianissimo presto leggiero*, imperturbable rhythmicality, his preference for the heroic over the melodramatic, and not least his wealth of poetic imagination, easily place him in elite company. 

managed to lure him to the piano on which happened to be the score of the Ballade. (After hearing that, we were treated to a late night recital from the Bolet back catalogue including Cuban dances and his own ending of the *Don Juan* Fantasy.) It is a piece Bolet obviously enjoyed. This account was recorded in October 1961 (the same day as the Debussy pieces, and the earliest session here) and appears, as does another Bolet favourite, Franck's *Prélude, Aria et Final* (the work that follows it on disc 2), on Vol 2 of Marston's retrospective of the pianist (7/15) heard live in Amsterdam in 1987.

Disc 3 begins with an account from 1971 of the *Andante spianato and Grand Polonaise* which I did not enjoy at all. It sounds thoroughly bad-tempered, the *Andante* played as if it were Rachmaninov and the *fioritura* passages in the Polonaise tight and scrambled. After the three Polonaises (Bolet at his most magisterial) come two specialities: Schumann-Liszt *Frühlingsnacht* (unmissable) and the J Strauss II-Godowsky *Symphonic Metamorphosis on Die Fledermaus (sui generis)*. All in all, a pianophile delight.

Jeremy Nicholas

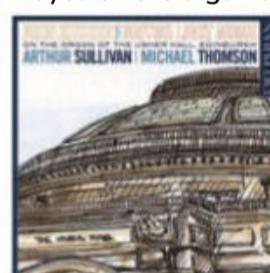
‘British Light Music’

Sullivan The Gondoliers - Cachucha; Gavotte. The Mikado - The sun whose rays. The Pirates of Penzance - Overture; Oh, is there not one maiden breast?. The Tempest - Act 3, Introduction (arr Bairstow). The Yeomen of the Guard - Overture **M Thomson** The Bard's Ceremonial. A Bouquet of Roses. On the Square. Parc de Paris. Salute to Busby Berkeley. Tullich to Inverey: Scots March. Whirly-Granny

John Kitchen org

Delphian Ⓛ DCD34212 (70' • DDD)

Played on the organ of the Usher Hall, Edinburgh



Although the Golden Age of the Town Hall Organist is – alas – just a distant memory for most of us, it is good to hear a large, colourful late-Romantic concert organ being put through its paces with such assurance and skill as John Kitchen does at Edinburgh's Usher Hall.

Rescued in recent years from decades of decline and disuse, this 63-stop instrument by Norman and Beard of 1914 is now sounding better than ever, helped by Paul Baxter's magnificent sound engineering. Half of Kitchen's programme is given over to his own idiomatic transcriptions of music by Sullivan, the rest to the music of Michael Thomson, a composer with a lifetime's connection with St Machar's

Cathedral in Aberdeen, who died in 2016. Time spent playing in that city's Capitol Cinema had clearly rubbed off on Thomson's style, which harks back to a simpler age where melody was king, with a strong reliance on predictable sequences, rather foursquare phrasing and toe-tapping rhythms. In his notes Kitchen refers to the influences of Cocker, Coates and CS Lang. I'm not so sure: their innate genius is sadly in short supply here. However, the lively *Parc de Paris* valse abounds with Gallic élan and the *Bouquet of Roses* medley is spun together with considerable skill. Alas, Thomson's *Salute to Busby Berkeley* would have been much more effective on a real theatre organ.

Kitchen's love of Sullivan's wonderful music shines through, especially in the two substantial overtures and the sparkling 'Cachucha' finale. The organ's softer stops are utterly charming, for example in 'The sun whose rays' (from *The Mikado*) and *The Gondoliers*' Gavotte. The string stops are also used to great effect.

Finest of all is the Introduction to Act 3 of *The Tempest*, transcribed by Edward Bairstow. This is a real find, full of charm and played – as with everything else on this disc – with great warmth and shapeliness.

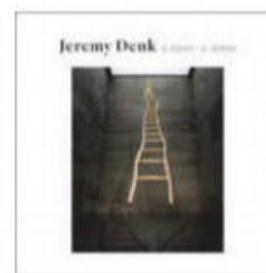
Malcolm Riley

‘c1300-c2000’

JS Bach ‘Chromatic’ Fantasia and Fugue, BWV903 **Beethoven** Piano Sonata No 32, Op 111 - 1st movt **Binchois** Triste plaisir **Brahms** Intermezzo, Op 119 No 1 **Byrd** A Voluntarie, for My Ladye Nevell **Chopin** Preludes, Op 28 - No 1; No 2 **Debussy** Images - Reflets dans l'eau **Dufay** Franc cuer gentil **Gesualdo** O dolce mio tesoro **Glass** Étude No 2 **Janequin** Au joly jeu du pousse avant **Josquin** Missa Pange lingua - **Kyrie Ligeti** Études - No 6, Automne à Varsovie **Machaut** Doulz amis **Monteverdi** Zefiro torna **Mozart** Piano Sonata No 16, K545 - 2nd movt **Ockeghem** Missa prolationum - **Kyrie Purcell** Ye Tuneful Muses - Ground **D Scarlatti** Keyboard Sonata, Kk551 **Schoenberg** Drei Klavierstücke, Op 11 - No 1 **Schumann** In der Nacht, Op 12 No 5 **Stockhausen** Klavierstück No 1 **Stravinsky** Piano-Rag-Music **Wagner** Isoldens Liebestod (transcr Liszt, S447)

Jeremy Denk pf

Nonesuch Ⓛ ② 7559 79347-1 (101' • DDD)



As ambitious recording projects go, this one must rank pretty high: so high, in fact, that it may be thought to have passed into the zone marked ‘futile’.

When asked by New York's Lincoln Center to prepare a concert for their 2016 White Light Festival, the American pianist Jeremy Denk decided to squeeze the history of Western music (and not just piano music) into the required 80 minutes (actually a little over – hence the two discs). There is plenty of lovely piano-playing here, from a fleet-footed Bach *Chromatic Fantasy* to an architecturally conceived *Isolde's Liebestod*, which is my personal highlight. The choices of repertoire on the second disc are never less than thought-provoking. The transition from Wagner to Brahms's Intermezzo, Op 119 No 1, is surprisingly seamless, and from there to Schoenberg's Op 11 No 1 illuminating. And although the piano sound will surely be too bright and the touch too heavy for some ears in the Romantic repertoire, in particular Schumann's 'In der Nacht', it definitely suits Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Ligeti and Stockhausen.

Yet the conceptual flaws of the project remain glaring, however much explanation and ‘disclaimer’ Denk has put in his booklet notes. Almost the entire first disc makes little sense as Denk seeks to convey the essence of Machaut, Binchois and others through simply direct transcription on to the piano. He does so well enough in pianistic terms. But shorn of words and timbral variety the result sounds little better than clever monochrome doodling, or like professorial musical illustrations from the days when no proper live performances or recordings of the repertoire were available. (The Binchois is repeated at the end, because Denk fondly imagines that it is somehow charged with new meaning.)

Admittedly, Denk's essay pre-empts the obvious reaction: that he is merely offering a set of illustrations for a glorified Music Appreciation 101 course. But to anticipate criticism is not to disarm it. And that's even before we get into the objections of having the history of classical music told via a few works by a few great white men. He says that his aim is to tell a story rather than to be didactic; either way he falls short.

When Denk admits that 'I'm sure every listener will be outraged by some omission or other', he is on the mark. Just the first movement of Beethoven's Op 111? No comment. And to offer this and the slow movement of Mozart's C major Sonata (the one he himself designated 'for beginners') as somehow representative of the Classical era is like introducing a person by revealing their left earlobe. If this is a kind of musical time-travel experience, as one sympathetic review of the Lincoln Center event put it, then I'm the child in the back asking 'Are we there yet?' Michelle Assay

Charles Wuorinen

Richard Whitehouse shines the spotlight on the radical yet unexperimental music of this highly respected American composer

Whis may not be a familiar name in the UK, indeed in Europe as a whole, but Charles Wuorinen (who turned 80 last year) is among the most prolific, versatile and respected figures in American post-war music. That an equally multifaceted creator as John Zorn considers him one of the world's greatest composers says much for the esteem in which Wuorinen is held, while also hinting at the protean inclusivity of one whose output, stretching back over some 65 years, defies easy categorisation – despite (or perhaps because of) its stylistic consistency.

How to begin investigating that output? One way is to focus on the four 'bambooula' pieces, each taking the eponymous Creole dance (also a percussion instrument) as a basis for marrying technical virtuosity with formal precision and expressive abandon that communicates easily regardless of its complexity. Starting with the sheer extroversion of *Grand Bamboula* (1971) for string orchestra, then moving from the knowing playfulness of *The Blue Bamboula* (1980) for piano and the visceral energy of *Bamboula Squared* (1984) for orchestra and electronics to the effervescent curtain-raiser that is *Bamboula Beach* (1986) for orchestra, this is a journey in which the listener experiences the force and impact of music that channels its unabashed modernist impulses towards being both engaging and combative: qualities which between them define the essence of Wuorinen's art.

He readily adapts standard forms so that any number of innovative solutions to age-old problems become possible

Mention of an electronic facet is a reminder that Wuorinen came to international prominence with *Time's Encomium* (1969), deploying 'synthesized and processed synthesized sound' with a methodical resourcefulness that secured him the 1970 Pulitzer Prize for music (making him, at the time, the youngest recipient). Despite this acclaim, he subsequently eschewed electronics as a creative medium (even resoring this piece for orchestra as *Contrafactum* – also 1969) and opted instead to translate those experiences gained into instrumental music as dense texturally as it is trenchant rhythmically.

So it's radical without being experimental – which might also be said of Wuorinen's approach to standard forms. His vast output (now extending to more than 250 acknowledged works) takes in eight symphonies as well as four each of piano concertos, piano sonatas and string quartets. These, along with contributions to all major genres, might suggest an



ambivalence regarding the interplay of tradition and progress – yet any accusation along these grounds has been firmly refuted by the fact that Wuorinen has never tackled such genres the same way twice; he will readily adapt, modify and, whenever necessary, dismantle their forms so that any number of innovative solutions to age-old problems become possible. Put another way, listeners might not always grasp the underlying journey that a Wuorinen composition pursues, yet the sense of a destination achieved is nearly always unmistakable.

An added factor in this is Wuorinen's proficiency as a musician. He was a formidable pianist (who premiered his first two concertos along with various chamber works) and was a member of the Group for Contemporary Music, which he co-founded in 1962 and which functioned as a model for the commissioning and performance of new pieces throughout its half-century of existence (the group ceased live performance in 2012). He has appeared frequently as a conductor, not least of the major American orchestras, while his activities as teacher, lecturer and polemicist are considerable. As contemptuous of technical shortcomings as of intellectual laziness, Wuorinen has sometimes been accused of elitism in the best modernist traditions, but his practicality of thinking is demonstrated by the textbook *Simple Composition* (Longman: 1979), which has attracted admiration and dissension in equal measure.

The extent and variety of Wuorinen's composing has not been marked by stylistic crises or aesthetic volte-faces, but a crucial juncture was undeniably marked by *A Reliquary for Igor Stravinsky* (1975). Approached by Stravinsky's widow to create a piece featuring sketches for an orchestral work that the aging and ailing composer had been unable to complete before his death in 1971, Wuorinen responded with a piece

WUORINEN FACTS

1938 Born in New York City on June 9 to Finnish parents

1954 Wins the New York Philharmonic's Young Composers' Award

1961 Awarded BA in music from Columbia University (MA follows in 1963)

1962 Co-founds the Group for Contemporary Music with Harvey Sollberger

1970 Awarded Pulitzer Prize for music for electronic work *Time's Encomium*

1971-79 Teaches at Manhattan School of Music, NYC

1979 Publication of textbook *Simple Composition*

1985 Awarded MacArthur Foundation Fellowship

1985-89 Composer-in-residence with San Francisco Symphony Orchestra

2004 Premiere of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* by New York City Opera on October 31

2014 Premiere of *Brokeback Mountain* at the Teatro Real, Madrid, on January 28

2018 80th birthday concert at Bargemusic, Fulton Ferry Landing, NYC, on June 9

pursued by the Fourth Piano Sonata (2007) with its strategic usage of repeated notes and sustained pitches to promote continuity throughout even the most disjunctive passages.

The opening decade of this century saw a productive association with James Levine and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, above all in the Eighth Symphony (2006), whose trajectory – a driving toccata, sustained threnody then mercurial finale – recalls that of the Symphonia (1993-97) by Elliott Carter, to whom Wuorinen might be thought a successor in his music's intellectual weight and visceral energy. This parallel is furthered (by no means indirectly) in *It Happens Like This* (2010), a 'dramatic cantata' for four soloists and chamber ensemble which sets poems by James Tate and whose often surreal and always amusing take on would-be plausible situations affords a vital reassessment of music theatre, making it an ideal double bill with Carter's opera *What Next?* (1997-98) – not least owing to a comparably offhand attitude to the nature of existence.

Interviewed by Bruce Duffie in 1987, Wuorinen seemed equivocal concerning further involvement with opera (he had written one actual opera at the time), but recent years have seen two evening-length works: *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (2001), after a novel by Salman Rushdie, and *Brokeback Mountain* (2008-12), after a short story by Annie Proulx (who devised the libretto). The latter is likely Wuorinen's largest undertaking and an undeniably controversial one in view of its basis in same-sex attraction from a perspective of social alienation and prejudice. The story had previously been adapted into a film (2005) by Ang Lee, and though Wuorinen's opera does not stand in direct opposition, it

that ingeniously 'enshrines' those fragments within his own music as evolved organically from their potential – the outcome at once a commemoration and continuation of the thinking of a composer to whom Wuorinen had long professed himself indebted. By so doing, he also combined the Schoenbergian and Stravinskian principles that had always been central to his own composition but had rarely been integrated before with such fluency and assurance.

The interplay of such principles has continued unabated, with works of the past two decades bringing synthesis and, by extension, a sense of summation. Examples include *Cyclops 2000*, a tensile chamber symphony centred on developing variation; and the Fourth Piano Concerto (2003; for Peter Serkin), with its assertive play on archetypal forms. This eliding of tradition and innovation was further

certainly avoids the film's tendency to glide over emotional antagonism in favour of scenic allure. In hindsight, this was inevitable, given the expressive density of Wuorinen's music, with its antecedents in the operas of Berg and in late Stravinsky – not least the starkly rhetorical yet innately flexible vocal writing. Given a mixed reception at its Madrid premiere, the opera ranks high among other 21st-century contributions to the genre and cries out for a UK staging.

Over the past six years, Wuorinen has continued to compose unabated, with several piano and ensemble works, and also choral and vocal settings, as well as *Eros and Nemesis* (2016) – a symphonic poem that draws on material from *Brokeback Mountain*. Recently completed are the Second String Trio, *Xenolith* for viola and percussion, *Sudden Changes* for Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony (all 2017) and *Burlesque* (2018) for two pianos. Various performances are scheduled in the US and Europe, while several recent recordings have expanded an already extensive discography. Otherwise, Wuorinen remains secure in his standing as the most significant modernist composer of the generation following Carter, Babbitt and Shapey. These three composers were active well into old age, Carter into his hundreds – on which basis Wuorinen can reasonably look forward to a sustained period of creativity, during which he will surely continue to enthrall and provoke in equal measure. 

A SNAPSHOT IN RECORDINGS

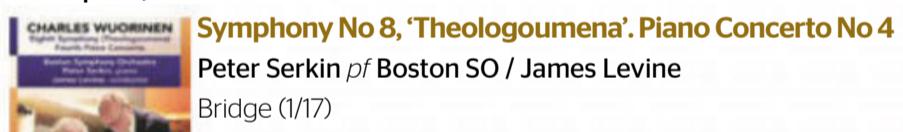
Featuring mainly post-millennium works by Wuorinen

**Cyclops 2000. A Reliquary for Igor Stravinsky**

London Sinfonietta / Oliver Knussen

London Sinfonietta (5/07)

An ambitious 'chamber symphony' for the millennium is coupled with a seminal piece from the mid-1970s – both conducted by Wuorinen's foremost British champion, the late Oliver Knussen.

**Symphony No 8, 'Theologoumena'. Piano Concerto No 4**

Peter Serkin pf Boston SO / James Levine

Bridge (1/17)

Here are two major works from Wuorinen's productive association with the Boston SO, performed by two of his leading advocates, and fusing contemporaneity with tradition in unexpected ways.

**Alphabetic Ashbery. Fourth Piano Sonata.****It Happens Like This**

Sharon Harms sop Laura Mercado-Wright contr

Steven Brennfleck ten Douglas Williams bass

Anne-Marie McDermott pf Loadbang;

The Group for Contemporary Music / Charles Wuorinen

Bridge (11/17)

This varied miscellany of post-millennium pieces is dominated by the 'anti-opera' *It Happens Like This*, which sets poems by James Tate as a cycle in which the mundane and surreal fight for supremacy.

**Brokeback Mountain**

Daniel Okulitch bass-bar Tom Randle ten Heather Buck sop et al; Madrid Teatro Real Chor and Orch / Titus Engel

Bel Air Classiques (7/15)

The most recent of Wuorinen's stage works, this is a powerful assertion of individuality against social conformity and results in one of the most impressive English-language operas so far this century.

Vocal



Edward Seckerson listens to Joyce DiDonato's new album 'Songplay':
'As a muso who straddles both the classical and popular genres, even I was thrown by some of the curve balls' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 79**



Lindsay Kemp greets a debut disc from the soprano Emőke Baráth:
'How nice it is to welcome not a disc of the same old Handel arias but a properly worked-out programme' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 79**

JS Bach

Cantatas - No 106, *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit* (*Actus tragicus*); No 182, *Himmelskönig, sei willkommen. Komm, Jesu, komm*, BWV229. Partita 'O Gott, du frommer Gott', BWV767^a. **Amici Voices** with ^a**Terence Charlston** org. Hyperion F CDA68275 (62' • DDD • T/t)



Defining a characterful selection of Bach's vocal music can often be as elusive as the

musical material itself. This skilfully imagined and recorded programme instils a distinctive and quiet confidence in three radiantly chiselled landscapes. Framed by two pre-Leipzig cantatas – the first from when the young composer was burning the candle at both ends in Mühlhausen – the conceit of this disc sits very much within the idea of solace, dependence on God in the face of human frailty and the strength of corporate faith.

Resonating in the bittersweet aesthetic of Bach's 17th-century forebears, fewer pieces benefit more from period instruments embedded in a flexible vocal ensemble than the funeral cantata, *Actus tragicus*. It's a work whose familiarity can encourage a form of genial complacency, for listeners as much as performers, as a soft palate of recorders and viols can enchant rather than enquire. Not so here, where luminescent textures and an organically evolving tactus result in a patiently contemplative essay. The implications of Bach's fragile treatment of consonance and dissonance in the opening Sonatina is not lost on Amici Voices. (The same can be said of Kurtág's four-hand piano reading, performed with his wife, on YouTube.)

The Palm Sunday cantata, *Himmelskönig, sei willkommen* (1714), constitutes an ingenious shift towards the maturing labyrinth of Bachian modernity – a remarkable fruit of the Weimar period. Again, the combined vocal and instrumental contributions of Amici

Voices get right inside the music. Their success is all about sustainably good judgement in knowing what really matters in communicating the essence of these exquisitely crafted cantatas. The highlight is Helen Charlston's mesmerising delivery of 'Leget euch' (how glorious is the image of the disciple wearing a spotless robe to be consecrated to the King!), lovingly accompanied by the flautist Ashley Solomon.

In between the cantatas, a much later work, the motet *Komm, Jesu, komm*, is given a lithe and considered reading. The vocal pitching is not always spot-on – and some may find the ensemble a touch too brittle and limited in colour – but the emotional directness and coherence of the musical shaping make for an experience not unlike the gratifying reading from Trinity Baroque (Raumklang, 5/08). In sum, this is as thoughtfully executed a Bach programme as you could possibly imagine. Most of all, it rings with truth and warms the heart. **Jonathan Freeman-Attwood**

Berlioz

L'enfance du Christ, Op 25
Sasha Cooke mez **Andrew Goodwin**,
Andrew Staples tens **Roderick Williams** bar
Matthew Brook, **Shane Laurencev** bass-bars /
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and Chorus /
Sir Andrew Davis
Chandos F ② CHSA5228
(90' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



Made in tandem with a series of concert performances in Melbourne last year, Andrew Davis's new recording of *L'enfance du Christ* takes its time, rather curiously, to find its feet. Berlioz's sacred trilogy is difficult to get right in performance, largely because the relationship between the theatrical and the contemplative needs to be carefully calibrated in order for the work to succeed, and it is a while before Davis fully

establishes the requisite balance. The opening narration, beautifully voiced by Andrew Staples, is strikingly introverted and rapt, but the scenes in *Jerusalem* that follow are in some respects too understated. The nocturnal march for the Roman soldiers carries little sense of threat, while Herod's insomniac agony isn't as intense and unsettling as it might be. The soloists are also less than ideal here. Shane Laurencev's *Polydorus* blusters, and Matthew Brook's sonorous Herod seems curiously disengaged in 'Ô misère des rois!', though his singing subsequently gathers strength as he vituperatively orders the *Massacre of the Innocents*.

Once we reach the stable in Bethlehem, however, Davis's conducting acquires greater focus. Everything is now beautifully paced and shaped, the dramatic and the devotional brought into careful alignment. Time briefly seems to stand still in 'Le repos de la Sainte Famille', and there's real tension when the Holy Family arrive in *Saïs*, only to meet with rejection from the city's xenophobic inhabitants, followed by a palpable surge of relief when they finally find refuge among the Ishmaelites. The solo singing is comparably more persuasive, too. Though not quite equalling the sublimity of Anne Sofie von Otter for John Eliot Gardiner (Erato, 1/98) or Janet Baker on Colin Davis's second recording (Philips, 1/98), Sasha Cooke makes a radiant Mary opposite Roderick Williams's tenderly solicitous Joseph. Staples, awed by the tale he is telling, is consistently good. And Brook really comes into his own as the Ishmaelite Father, singing with deep sincerity and fervour.

The Melbourne Symphony, meanwhile, sound very warm and plush, perhaps a bit too much so for some tastes in this work, but their playing is beautifully articulated and detailed. The set's principal strength, however, lies in the choral singing, which is superb throughout in its clarity, balance and dynamic control: 'L'adieu des bergers' sounds ravishing; the careful shading of the unaccompanied closing chorus takes your breath away; and we finally realise that after



The combined vocal and instrumental contributions of Amici Voices get right inside Bach's music

that indifferent opening, the performance has gradually evolved into something profoundly touching. Not a first-choice recording for the work, perhaps, though the best of it is very fine indeed. **Tim Ashley**

Britten

AMDG (Ad majorem Dei gloriam). Choral Dances from *Gloriana*, Op 53. Five Flower Songs, Op 47. A Hymn to the Virgin. Hymn to St Cecilia, Op 27

RIAS Chamber Choir / Justin Doyle

Harmonia Mundi  (54' • DDD • T)

When it comes to *a cappella* vocal compositions, Benjamin Britten

never surpassed *A Boy was Born*, the 'choral variations' he wrote at the age of 19 in 1933. This requires a group of boy's voices as well as the usual 'mixed' choir, but it would be good if one day the Berlin-based RIAS Chamber Choir with their British conductor Justin Doyle could add it to their discography. They respond brilliantly to the many challenges of *AMDG (Ad majorem Dei gloriam)*, Britten's seven settings of Gerard

Manley Hopkins. Drafted at great speed in August 1939, soon after his arrival in North America, they were then discarded – probably because he was under pressure to complete two major works, *Les illuminations* and the Violin Concerto, and then compose the *Sinfonia da Requiem* before plunging into another problem piece which (after its initial performances) he would set aside for many years, the operetta *Paul Bunyan*.

The Hopkins settings (unperformed until 1984) were originally intended for solo voices but the sonorous weight and burnished tone of the RIAS ensemble (recorded with appropriate spaciousness and clarity of focus in Berlin's Jesus-Christus-Kirche) bring out the dramatic power and lyric intensity of Britten at his most imaginative. The fleetly flowing dance rhythms of 'Rosa mystica', the aggressively affirmative 'God's Grandeur', and the harsh swagger of 'The Soldier' (anticipations of *War Requiem* here) all display the special self-assurance of the younger Britten, and it can only have been questions about their suitability for the intended voices and the possibility of further textural refinements that led to their abandonment.

The rest of the programme is more decorous – especially so in the gentle gravity of the precocious teenager's Howells-like *Hymn to the Virgin* (1930). But there is still ample ebullience in the playful euphonies of Britten's marvellously deft setting of Auden's *Hymn to St Cecilia* (1942) and in the little suite of Choral Dances from the coronation opera *Gloriana* (1953). Finally, the *Five Flower Songs* (1950) were a Silver Wedding present for the founders of Dartington Hall in Devon; an affectionate, only slightly tongue-in-cheek homage to the great British part-song tradition.

Arnold Whittall

F Loewe

Brigadoon

Cast includes **Kelli O'Hara** and **Patrick Wilson**; **New York City Center 2017 Cast / Rob Berman**

Ghostlight  (58' • DDD)

Ghostlight  (58' • DDD)



Of all Lerner and Loewe's Broadway shows – and it's a small but perfectly formed list – *Brigadoon* has to be my favourite. *My Fair Lady* is undoubtedly one of only a



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Angelika Kirchschlager Julius Drake



Benjamin Appl Graham Johnson OBE



Miah Persson Joseph Middleton

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To see the full programme and for tickets please visit the Leeds College of Music website or contact the box office: www.lcm.ac.uk / 0113 222 3434

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An alternative Vespers: Ludus Modalis perform Monteverdi's masterpiece with continuo but without other instruments

handful of musicals that could be described as perfect but *Brigadoon*, for all its whimsy and imperfection, has my heart. Now and for ever. It contains the most beguiling set of drop-dead gorgeous melodies – few shows are as generous on ballads – and however fanciful and/or dubious its Scottish accent, its big-heartedness is irresistible.

New York City Center Encores – an NYC haven for neglected or forgotten shows – has now revived the show six times, a testament to its enduring appeal, and this latest manifestation with the delectable Kelli O'Hara as Fiona is most welcome. Indeed, just hearing O'Hara slip effortlessly into the lilting chorus of her first number, 'Waitin' for my dearie', was all the persuading I needed.

All right, so the original Broadway orchestrations (charming though they are) are no match for Conrad Salinger's sumptuous feast of swooning strings and descanting unison horns in the MGM movie – 'Heather on the hill' will never be the same without them or Gene Kelly, for that matter – but the producers were brutal over the length of the film and denied us four numbers, including Meg's two comedy turns and, more inexplicably, the great ballads 'Come

to me, bend to me' and 'There but for you go I', which were recorded for the film but later excluded. They are irreplaceable and have to be there.

So this 2017 revival features the feisty Stephanie J Block (love this voice) as Meg, nailing all the punchlines and belt notes of 'The love of my life', and relative Broadway newcomer Ross Lekites as Charlie – a lovely lyric show tenor who thoroughly refreshes 'Come to me, bend to me' and wins hearts with his swooning high B natural. Not surprisingly, the crucial falling-sixth interval of this number carried more than a hint of *déjà vu* when Andrew Lloyd Webber redeployed it in 'Music of the night' for his *Phantom*. I guess it was simply in his head. For sure it's hard to get out of anyone's head.

Kelli O'Hara and Patrick Wilson (the Curly from the National Theatre's Broadway transfer of Trevor Nunn's *Oklahoma!*) make for romantic leads blessed with old-school vocal credentials. If I'm quibbling I'd say that the tempo for 'There but for you go I' is a trifle hasty – since this is one melody you never want to let go of. But the 11 o'clock duet 'From this day on' breaks your heart as the best show songs are wont to do – and Lerner's tender lyric is engraved for all to see as you remove the

CD from the jewel case: 'Through all the years to come / An' through all the tears to come / I know I'll be yours / From this day on.' **Edward Seckerson**

Monteverdi

Vespro della Beata Vergine

Ludus Modalis / Bruno Boterf

Ramée F ② RAM1702 (91' • DDD • T/t)



The bold claim that this is 'the first recording of the *Vespers* in the alternative version proposed by the composer, without *concertato* instruments' is untrue – the York Bach Choir and Peter Seymour already recorded Monteverdi's iconic collection with the voices accompanied only by continuo instruments (Cloister, 2004) – although nowadays their version is next to impossible to find. In principle it is a plausible practice that less abundantly resourced churches could have used for the part-books to fit local circumstances.

A few aspects of Ludus Modalis's interpretation are anachronistic – such

as bowed bass viol continuo in solo pieces (not normal practice in early 17th-century Italy), soloistic passages sometimes sung by multiple singers on a part (particularly those lines sustaining a cantus firmus), and *chiavette* clefs are ignored in the six-voice version of the *Magnificat* (its implausibly high range is nevertheless executed beautifully). Plainchant antiphons are sung either side of the psalms but the alternating solo pieces, motets and the hymn were surely never intended to be performed in their published sequence during an actual Vespers service; the remainder of liturgical proceedings after the *Magnificat* is absent. This thoughtful and enjoyable performance is essentially another modern day reinvention of Monteverdi's fascinating masterpiece.

Bruno Boterf writes that his conception is 'closer to the polyphonic world of Palestrina and the Franco-Flemish masters'. Thirteen singers are accompanied by an unusually prevalent church organ modelled after an early 17th-century Italian instrument by Costanzo Antegnati (whose family built and maintained the organ at Santa Barbara in Mantua); a compelling variety of rich registrations are played fulsomely by Anne-Marie Blondel. Jean-Luc Ho alternates between two harpsichords (one strung with gut, the other with brass), contributing distinctive textures – nowhere more so than in 'Nigra sum' (sung ardently by Boterf) and 'Duo Seraphim' (the momentum of the rich continuo realisation detracts slightly from the mysticism when the third tenor joins at the line 'Tres sunt, qui testimonium dant in coelo'). There are no theorbos but bass sackbut, bass cornett and bass viol are often at the forefront on the bass part (this alternative *Vespers* is not quite as unaccompanied as it could have been). The instrumentally rich 'Sonata sopra Sancta Maria' is replaced by an adaptation of a ricercare by Frescobaldi. Even if their fresh approach risks feeling like playing tennis without a net, *Ludus Modalis* conjure a dazzling range of fascinating sonorities. **David Vickers**

Selected comparison:

York Bach Ch, Seymour (CLOI) CLOCD0304

Purcell

'Sweeter than Roses'

Corbetta Suite in C **Draghi** Suite in E minor

H Lawes A Lover's Legacy. No Reprieve

Purcell Celia's fond, too long I've lov'd her, Z364. Cupid, the slyest rogue alive, Z367. I came, I saw, and was undone (The Thraldom), Z375. In the black, dismal dungeon of despair, Z190. King Arthur - How blest are shepherds. Love arms

himself in Celia's eyes, Z392. Now that the sun hath veil'd his light (An Evening Hymn), Z193. Oh! fair Cedaria, hide those eyes, Z402. On the brow of Richmond Hill, Z405. She loves and she confesses too, Z413. Sweeter than roses, Z585/1. Urge me no more, Z426

Anna Dennis sop

Sounds Baroque / Julian Perkins kybds

Resonus  RES10235 (68' • DDD • T)

Soprano Anna Dennis hasn't got the classic Purcell voice. Look through the composer's discography and you'll find Emma Kirkby, Barbara Bonney, Carolyn Sampson, Nancy Argenta – brighter, lighter, more nimble voices all. But the soprano's oaked tone and more thickly painted vocal lines bring an attractive shift of perspective to this, her first solo recital disc.

It's an interesting selection of songs. Dennis and her collaborators Julian Perkins and Sounds Baroque have avoided many of the big hits in favour of a quirkier programme. We do get 'An Evening Hymn' (dispatched rather matter-of-factly, and at fairly brisk pace), 'How blest are shepherds' from *King Arthur*, and of course the title-track, whose sudden mood-shifts and more expansive, arioso-like form suit Dennis better, but beyond that we're into the more unusual territory.

Dennis's lower centre of vocal gravity anchors a wonderfully brooding and inky 'In the black, dismal dungeon of despair' and brings warmth and weight to Henry Lawes's 'No Reprieve', with its heartbreakingly desolate refrain 'Alas! Undone to fate, I bow my head', and the soprano's superb diction and attention to text bring a lovely lightness to the vivacious 'Cupid, the slyest rogue alive'. But the delivery never feels quite as relaxed or released as Sampson (BIS, 12/07; and also Wigmore Hall Live, 9/16) – still the benchmark here for ease and thoughtful inflection.

It's the instrumental contributions that really make the disc. Perkins's harpsichord offers sparkling commentary in 'She loves and she confesses too', vamping up the ground bass to almost Nyman-like intensity. Giovanni Battista Draghi's Suite in E minor gets similarly loving treatment, its short movements all carefully coloured, while James Akers makes a highlight of Francesco Corbetta's Suite in C, his guitar now lute-like and delicate, now thrumming tuned percussion.

Alexandra Coghlan

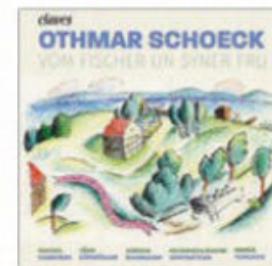
Schoeck

Vom Fischer un syner Fru, Op 43

Rachel Harnisch sop **Jörg Dürmüller** ten

Jordan Shanahan bass **Musikkollegium**

Winterthur / Mario Venzago

Claves  50-1815 (36' • DDD • T)

Othmar Schoeck is probably best known for his song collections, continuing

the melancholic romanticism of the Schubert-Wolf tradition into the mid-20th century. His flair for the miniature was not always equalled by effectiveness on the larger scale, and a degree of indecisiveness might be thought to have led Schoeck to describe this 'dramatic cantata' (1928-30) as 'for stage or concert performance'.

Alternatively, Schoeck might have welcomed the more modern embrace of ambiguity, reflecting the flexibility of Stravinsky and other contemporaries in seeking a new kind of generic compromise between something stageable and something that worked equally well in concert performance. Another hybrid feature of *The Fisherman and his Wife* relates to Schoeck's use of a text (from the Brothers Grimm's fairy tales) in 'low' German dialect (*Plattdeutsch*) rather than the more familiar 'high' German (*Hochdeutsch*). On the one hand, the piece is not called 'Von dem Fischer und seiner Frau'; on the other, there is little or nothing 'low' about the music, which shuns the earthiness of Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* or Weill's *Mahagonny-Songspiel* in favour of Schoeck's distinctive late romanticism. There may be hints of Hindemith and Stravinsky but the predominant tone is that of Strauss, Pfitzner or Schoeck's teacher Max Reger.

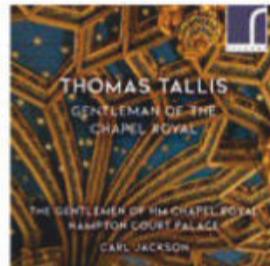
The story is a classic 'be careful what you wish for' parable, depicting female greed and male timidity with a complete lack of present-day political correctness. The complacent fisherman and his restless wife live in a 'shabby shack', so when the fisherman nets a flounder (flatfish) who claims to be an enchanted prince with magical powers, the wife seizes her chance. She nags her husband into demanding progressively wilder transformations – shack into cottage, cottage into palace, then herself into king, emperor, pope (complete gender blindness here). Only when she demands to become God does the magical flounder recoil, and husband and wife find themselves back in their original shabbiness with – according to Schoeck – a measure of relief and acceptance.

The vocal parts cover the short refrain-like dialogues between the three characters while orchestral interludes vividly portray the various transformations, culminating in the flounder's turbulent rejection of the wife's demands. The mix of raw, dialect text and highly seasoned music won't be to everyone's taste – this is indeed early 19th-century culture trying on the musical costume of a later time. But the performance in this radio recording is first-class: collectors in search of something that stands determinedly apart from what you might expect of new music at the end of the 1920s should not hesitate. **Arnold Whittall**

Tallis

'Gentleman of the Chapel Royal'

Mass for Four Voices. *Missa Puer natus est nobis. In pace in idipsum. Loquebantur variis linguis. Miserere nostri Domine. Si enim iniquitates. Suscipe quae so Domine*
The Gentlemen of HM Chapel Royal, Hampton Court Palace / Carl Jackson
 Resonus (F) RES10229 (68' • DDD • T/t)



The Chapel Royal's place within English music can hardly be overstated: during the reigns of the later Tudors its membership was a roll call of the most illustrious composers. One of these was Tallis, who probably composed the seven-voice *Missa Puer natus est* for it (it is widely believed that a meeting between the Chapel Royal and its Spanish counterpart, the Capilla Flamenca, was somehow involved). So it is fitting that the Mass is the centrepiece of a recording by one of its modern incarnations, alongside a handful of motets and responsories, and the somewhat earlier four-part Mass.

All these pieces are exceptionally well served in the discography, especially the seven-voice Mass. It's a luxury enjoyed by few pre-Baroque pieces, and one cannot help but listen to any new reading in that light. Everything is performed two-to-a-part by the men and the sound is pleasingly compact (worth mentioning, given how much seven-part music is involved). Where the music shapes itself and gives them clear leads (particularly in the four-part Mass) things go well, but in the seven-part music the impression is midway between a read-through and an interpretation. There are certainly idiomatic moments (the final *Agnus Dei* of *Puer natus est*, for example) but too

often textures are static, with little sense of architecture or pacing. The blend of the pairs of voices isn't always secure (try the penultimate chord of the four-voice Mass), with inevitable consequences for the overall sound and the projection of complex textures, and the tempo chosen for the *Miserere nostri* means that passing dissonances are unnecessarily emphasised. On the whole, the less ambitious music is the better served.

Fabrice Fitch

'Paris Madrid'

Albéniz Leyendas - Asturias **Barrera/Calleja**
Granadinas **Bretón** La jota de la Dolores **Dupont**
Mandoline **Falla** Siete Cancionciones populares
 españolas **Granados** Tonadillas en estilo
 antiguo **Massenet** Élégie **Ravel** Vocalise-étude
 en forme de habanera **Rodrigo** Adela. Aranjuez
 mi amor. Coplas del pastor enamorado. Coplillas
 de Belén **Sor** Cuando de ti me aparto. Sin duda
 que tus ojos **Tárrega** Capricho árabe. Recuerdos
 de la Alhambra
Sandrine Piau sop **Charles Castronovo, Rolando**
Villazón tens **Liat Cohen, Gil Waysbort** gtrs
 Erato (F) 9029 56937-2 (80' • DDD • T)



Israeli-born, Paris-trained and, as a guitarist, naturally steeped in the Spanish repertory, Liat Cohen here sets out to 'tell the wonderful love story that binds together France and Spain'. The story may not be new but what's interesting is how much on this generous recital isn't actually associated with the guitar. There's a 'medley' that joins a pair of popular zarzuela duets, rousing sung by Charles Castronovo and Rolando Villazón. The second number, 'Granadinas', is especially fun, with the tenors sounding slightly inebriated.

Miguel Llobet's arrangement of Falla's *Canciones populares* has been recorded before, but the set is usually sung by a soprano. Castronovo does a lovely job. His baritonal tone has the quality of luxuriously soft, mahogany-coloured leather, and he's sensitive to the music's various folkloric nuances. I quite like the slight breathiness of his sound in 'Nana', for example, and the way it heightens the song's comfortingly intimate character. The French songs (originally for voice and piano), too, are all charmers. Sandrine Piau sings the Ravel ravishingly, and she's more impressive still in the three parts of Granados's 'La maja dolorosa'. The first drips with

gorgeous melancholy, and how effectively she uses her lower register in the third.

Cohen is a sensitive and colourful partner throughout but I have mixed feelings about her playing in the solo pieces. The throaty tone she brings to the melody of Tárrega's *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* is fetching but *Capricho árabe* is far too heavily accented. And while it's admirable she's made her own colourful transcription of Albéniz's *Asturias* (rather than playing Tárrega's), it wants more fire. I'm also on the fence about the vocal arrangement of the slow movement of Rodrigo's *Concierto*; it's beautifully sung but a little cheesy, like something you might hear in a television advertisement. Fly to Aranjuez ...

Texts are provided but, sadly, no translations. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

'Portraying Passion'

Ives Five Songs (orch J Adams)^a. The
 Unanswered Question^b **Paus** Hate Songs^a
Weill Die sieben Todsünden^b
Tora Augestad mez Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra /
^aChristian Eggen, ^bJoshua Weilerstein
 LAWO (F) LWC1164 (73' • DDD • T/t)



If you find yourself torn between a smoke-and-whisky-pickled cabaret take on Kurt Weill's ballet-with-song *Die sieben Todsünden* ('The Seven Deadly Sins') and a sleek operatic version, the Norwegian mezzo-soprano Tora Augestad might offer an appealing compromise. Trained both in jazz and classical styles, with a new-music-focused career that straddles the two, Augestad gamely walks the line in Weill's darkly sardonic parable about capitalism. Singing in the original high key, she starts off playing the straight man to Joshua Weilerstein and the Oslo Philharmonic's knowing, white-faced clown. But if she starts at a remove, as though watching the action from high above, as the Annas' situation intensifies she gradually becomes more involved, culminating in a 'Neid' of grotesque cruelty – tonally distorted, a forced musical confession. The shift highlights the duality of a piece about split selves, enacting the subtle tug and pull as Anna I presses her advantage over Anna II.

Augestad's is an efficient, adaptable voice, as we hear in a programme that also includes Marcus Paus's *Hate Songs*

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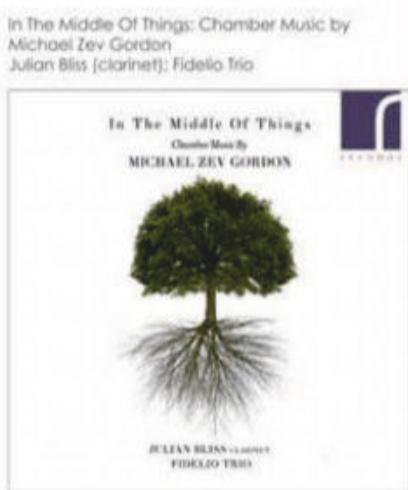
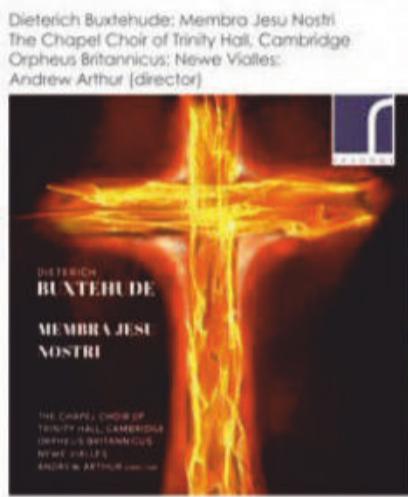
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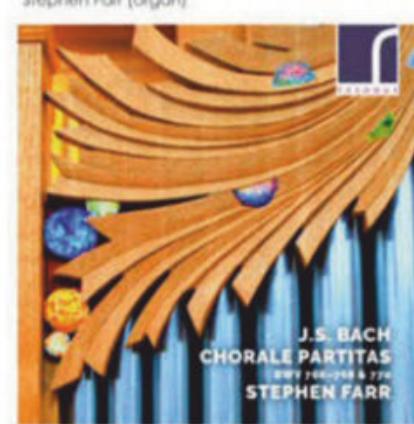


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and five songs by Charles Ives. It hasn't got quite the gloss and glow of Anne Sophie von Otter (DG), nor does her delivery achieve anything close to the tonal depth and ease of Brigitte Fassbaender (Harmonia Mundi), but it offers something closer to cabaret than either – a more inflected, theatrical take on Brecht's bitter text.

The Weill is the pick of the disc. Paus's *Hate Songs* – settings of deliciously acid Dorothy Parker texts dismantling every male stereotype in the book – is an elegantly orchestrated divertissement but little more. A nod to Bernstein's *I Hate Music!* at the start (its memorable opening octave leap self-consciously soured here) sets the tone for a work that's all aphorism and theatrical gesture, at its best in the satirical cadenzas rather than the sentimental leanings of the songs. Augestad dispatches it cleanly but it leaves little lasting impression, especially when sat alongside the Ives.

It's here that we really miss the scope of an operatic voice. Augestad's blanched, brittle instrument floats on the musical surface but never really dives in among John Adams's lavish orchestrations (a little distant in the mix here), and lacks the vibrato to sustain the long melodies.

Alexandra Coghlan

‘Songplay’

Bock She Loves Me - Will he like me?
Caccini Le nuove musiche - Amarilli, mia bella
Conti Dopo tante e tante pene - Quella fiamma
Ellington (In My) Solitude **Giordani**
Caro mio ben **Paisiello** **La Molinara - Nel cor più non mi sento** **Parisotti/Rosa** **Se tu m'ammi**
Star vicino **Rodgers** **Spring is Here - With a song in my heart** **Scheer** **Lean Away** **Shearing**
Lullaby of Birdland **Torelli** **Tu lo sai** **Vivaldi**
Arsilda - Col piacer della mia fede. **Il Giustino - Vedrò con mio diletto** **Wrubel** (I'm afraid) The masquerade is over
Joyce DiDonato **mez** **Charlie Porter** **tpt**
Lautaro Greco **bandoneón** **Craig Terry** **pf/hpd**
Chuck Israels **db** **Jimmy Madison** **drums**
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What we have here is the epitome of what we Brits call a 'Marmite' experience, with elements to love and/or loathe, whether or not you buy the concept in the first place. Joyce DiDonato's fans will, of course (and I am one), though as a muso and a journalist who straddles both the classical and popular genres I have to say

that even I was thrown by some of the curve balls.

DiDonato's penchant for the theatrical, the unexpected and even the slightly subversive is well known to us. 'Songplay' (as the title suggests) is no exception, embarking upon a capricious game of rediscovery and reinvention with a motley collection of songs (predominantly from the Italian songbook but that of her native America, too), each given a stylistic twist through the collective endeavours (and brilliance) of her jazz-centric collaborators: the poetic Craig Terry (piano), Charlie Porter (trumpet), Chuck Israels (bass) and Jimmy Madison (drums). So we might swing the Baroque, smooch or samba our way through the *da capo* or even lend the flavour of a tango through the evocative bandoneón of Lautaro Greco.

But the real twist here is that DiDonato retains the 'formality' of her operatic sound and delivery while attempting to apply a jazzier's instincts. So her singerly embellishments rub shoulders with jazz improv to achieve a deliberately provocative and (to my mind) unsettling dynamic. Some things work (the purer the treatment, the more poetic the outcome); others fail spectacularly.

It's interesting to me that the Italian numbers generally sound happier than the American ones. The operatic delivery (however scaled down) sits more comfortably with the Italian language than her slightly 'formal' enunciation and projection of the English. Even then there are exceptions: Gene Scheer's 'Lean Away' is possessed of a folksy simplicity and the overwhelming feeling is that less really is more with this album.

The best of it comes when voice and piano are in cool, quiet accord: Giordano's 'Caro mio ben' and Paisiello's 'Nel cor più non mi sento' sit very simply on pianist Craig Terry's exquisitely placed chords and harmonies; Caccini's 'Amarilli, mia bella' conveys a sultry desire; and Torelli's 'Tu lo sai' quietly inhabits the melancholy of the song, piano and trumpet at their most jazzily, smokily wistful.

It all starts to unravel for me when up-tempo jazz and opera collide. Ellington's '(In My) Solitude' and Wrubel/Magidson's '(I'm afraid) The masquerade is over' just sound uncomfortable and incongruous, as if (notwithstanding the 'bending' of notes and inherent portamento) the voice just doesn't belong in this context. I get that

that's the twist behind the album but in those moments I just want one or the other – jazz or opera – not both at the same time.

I wish that George Shearing's 'Lullaby of Birdland' had remained in the Baroque/Bachian mode of the opening – that is so cute. But the operatic quality of the voice alone makes the playfulness of the up-tempo section just sound, well, embarrassingly 'arch'. The same is also true, alas, of the two musical theatre songs included here. It's a genre I feel passionate about and protective towards, and again the phrasing and sound of DiDonato's rendition of 'Will he like me?' from Bock and Harnick's *She Loves Me* just feels wrong, and, by her standards, not particularly well sung either. Nor is Rodgers and Hart's 'With a song in my heart', one of my very favourite songs of all time and one in which the operatic complexion of her voice might well have worked in a different context. Rodgers did so hate people messing with his stuff and would undoubtedly have taken exception to the climax of the song never being delivered as he wrote it. First time around, the exciting 'money' note, E flat – the note on which the melody 'turns' into the climax – is dropped to a G and the return simply takes that G up an octave, so we still don't hear the note Rodgers actually wrote. Sounds minor, but you don't mess with a melody this good.

I have come to the conclusion that this whole project would have worked better with a few judicious exclusions and with just Craig Terry's searching hands at the keys of his piano. He really is a star. By the way, there's a little unannounced surprise following the last track – for those of you who get that far.

Edward Seckerson

‘Voglio cantar’

Cavalli **Canzon a 3. Statira, principessa di Persia - Sinfonia; Alba, ch'imperli i fiori ...**
Amor, che mascherasti; Cresce il foco, avvampa il core; Vanne intrepido **Cesti**
Speranza ingannatrice **Marini** **Affetti musicali, Op 1 - Sinfonia grave 'La Zorzi'. Sonata sopra Fuggi dolente core, Op 22 No 21** **Merula** **Ballo detto Eccardo, Op 12 No 19** **Strozzi** **Amante loquace, Op 6 No 16. Arie a voce sola, Op 8 - No 4, L'Astratto; No 6, Che si può fare. Diporti di Euterpe, Op 7 - Lamento (Lagrime mie); Mi fa rider la Speranza. Il lamento (Sul Rodano severo), Op 2 No 17**
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The Gonzaga Band play music published in Venice in 1629 with virtuosity and brilliant sonorities

inding paid work and searching for inspiration are fundamental concerns for musicians in every age. A cross-section of sacred and secular vocal music from England, Italy and Germany reveals how 17th-century and early 18th-century composers (and their works) crossed borders, were influenced by other European cultures or simply sought ways to eke out a living.

Pelham Humfrey's studies in France (perhaps with Lully) and Italy were funded by Charles II. Returning after nearly three years abroad, the 20-year-old did not impress Pepys, who thought him 'an absolute Monsieur, ... [who] disparages everything'. Nevertheless, Humfrey pioneered continental elements in his English symphony anthems – and seven of the finest are performed by the Oxford Consort of Voices (six singers) and the Instruments of Time & Truth (four string players). Directing from the organ, Edward Higginbottom proposes that the small chapel at Whitehall lent itself to 'sacred chamber music'. The contoured madrigalian approach is eminently suitable for the chromatic penitential twists in *By the waters of Babylon* and the plangent F minor harmonies in *O Lord my God, why hast thou forsaken me.*

The Gonzaga Band explore a range of music all published in Venice in 1629 – a landmark year because Schütz returned to La Serenissima nearly two decades after his studies with Gabrieli. The visitor soaked up new styles practiced by Monteverdi and other musicians associated with Venice. Two solo motets from Schütz's *Symphoniae sacrae* (printed nine months after his arrival) and Monteverdi's *Exulta, filia Sion* are sung by Faye Newton with sparkling clarity of tone, eloquent diction and relaxed embellishments of rare intelligence. Sonatas by Castello and Marini are likely to be the only other music here familiar to even ardent enthusiasts of early 17th-century Italian music; nearly half of the vocal and instrumental pieces by assorted composers have never been recorded before. Violinists Oliver Webber and Theresa Caudle, cornettists Jamie Savan and Helen Roberts and keyboardist Steven Devine play with abundant fluency, shapely virtuosity and brilliant sonorities.

The transmission of Italian music in 17th-century Saxony was also accomplished by the huge two-volume collection **Florilegium Portense** (Leipzig, 1618 and 1621). The part-books also contain motets by Lassus, Praetorius, Hassler (Schütz's predecessor in Dresden

who had also studied in Venice), and hymns by Sethus Calvisius (the Leipzig Thomaskantor). Peter Kopp whittles the repository down to an hour of selected pieces. The warmly expressive Vocal Concert Dresden is often reinforced by the instrumentalists Cappella Sagittariana. Polychoral details are balanced delightfully in Gabrieli's eight-voice setting of *Jubilate Deo*, whereas Jacobus Handl Gallus's funeral motet *Ecce quomodo moritur justus* (borrowed by Handel) is treated with poignant *a cappella* simplicity. Look no further if you want to know the broader repertory of the choir at St Thomas's during Bach's tenure a century later – in 1729 he ordered new part-books to replace those that were worn out.

The Thomasschule had a history of eminent Kantors before Bach arrived. The sacred music of his predecessor **Kuhnau** is the subject of complete series by Opella Musica (a consort of single voices) and Camerata Lipsiensis, conducted by Gregor Meyer. The funeral song *Ach, Gott, wie lässt du mich verstarren* (1680) makes effective use of five voices accompanied by continuo, whereas *Muss nicht der Mensch auf dieser Erden* is a splendid cantata for solo tenor declaimed assertively by Tobias Hunger, with concertante trumpet, violin and organ (a fine restored Silbermann in Rötha).

When Kuhnau died in 1722, the town council discussed the possibility of several Leipzig alumni as his successor. **Fasch** trained at the Thomasschule but was unavailable because he had recently been employed as Kapellmeister at the court of Anhalt-Zerbst. Three assorted works are performed by Rheinische Kantorei and Das Kleine Konzert, conducted by Hermann Max. An attractive Orchestral Suite in A major is an aperitif between the Annunciation cantata *Ich danke dem Herrn vom ganzen Herzen* (1735) and a substantial Latin Mass comprising a *Kyrie* and clever patchwork sequences in the *Gloria* and *Credo* – an extraordinary setting of the 'Crucifixus' has suspension-laden stabbing strings and plaintive choral harmonies.

Graupner (also Kuhnau's pupil) auditioned for the post of Thomaskantor – but the Landgrave of Hesse-Darmstadt offered his Kapellmeister an improved salary. Three cantatas composed for Lent 1741 are performed exquisitely by the Solistenensemble Ex Tempore and Mannheimer Hofkapelle, conducted sagaciously by Florian Heyerick. The charming music may not seem consistent with the *topos* of devoutly contemplative

texts on aspects of the Passion story, but if you scratch the surface there is a richness of poignancy and an abundance of fertile musical invention in accompanied recitatives, extended arias featuring varying combinations of concertante instruments, and deeply expressive choral writing – particularly in the Good Friday cantata *Die Gesegnete Vollendung der Leiden Jesu*.

The Leipzig authorities hoped **Telemann** would be interested, but he had just got a better job in Hamburg. Michael Alexander Willens and the Kölner Akademie premiere three rediscovered short oratorios from Telemann's 1730-31 cycle for the liturgical year, performed superbly by eight singers and just over 20 instrumentalists (the same resources Telemann had at his disposal). *Schmecket und sehet, wie Freundlich* presents Joy inviting Prayer, Love, Faith, Hope and Fidelity to assemble in Bethlehem to praise the valour and compassion of the newborn Christ – celebratory trumpets and drums are used charmingly in juxtaposition with pastoral flutes, and the delectable central aria for gentle strings and solo flute is sung gorgeously by alto Nicole Pieper.

Bach impressed the Leipzig councillors at his audition and managed to get a favourable release from his contract with Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen. The six parts of the *Christmas Oratorio* (1735-36) are given a zesty interpretation by Musica Fiorita, directed from the harpsichord by Daniela Dolci. Recorded in Basel during Christmas 2017, the presence of one theorbo, let alone two, seems anachronistic, but woodwind textures have sonorous warmth, and natural trumpets and horns produce piquant colours. The choir (four soloists with two ripienists on each line) make a robust impact. Bolder music-making suffers from reverberant boominess (the choir is paradoxically distant yet forceful), but there is undeniably a sense of occasion.

Italian composers also migrated in pursuit of lucrative commissions. The Neapolitan **Porpora** spent several years in London, and also worked in Dresden and Vienna. The oratorio *Il verbo in carne* (c1747) was first performed in Naples and later revised for another performance elsewhere (perhaps Dresden). The Basel Chamber Orchestra's live recording is abridged to less than half of the work. Justice (Robert Invernizzi) and Peace (Terry Wey) despair of the problems that beset humankind, but these worries are resolved when they discover that Christ has just been born in Bethlehem. Riccardo Minasi directs from the violin and pays

keen attention to kaleidoscopic string timbres, and the *galant* sinfonias feature captivating pairs of pastoral flutes and horns.

Of course, some musicians stayed put at home. The cellist **Giovanni Lorenzo Lulier** spent his entire life in Rome, where his career was closely in parallel to his colleague Corelli; in 1690 they both transferred to the service of Cardinal Ottoboni for the remainder of their lives. A selection of four chamber cantatas created by Lulier for the Arcadian Academy's Sunday afternoon *conversazioni* are sung bewitchingly by Francesca Boncompagni; her intimate lyricism, crystalline delivery of poetry and stylish musicianship are matched by cellist Marco Ceccato and his aptly named ensemble Accademia Ottoboni – who also contribute exquisite performances of two sonatas preserved in the Bodleian Library. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Humfrey Symphony Anthems
Consort of Voices / Higginbottom
Pan Classics **F** PC10388



Various Cpsrs 'Venice 1629'
The Gonzaga Band
Resonus **F** RES10218



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Kuhnau Cpte Sacred Works, Vol 4
Opella Musica; Camerata Lipsiensis
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Fasch Ich danke dem Herrn
Rheinische Kantorei / Max
CPO **F** CPO555 176-2



Graupner Passion Cantatas, Vol 2
Ex Tempore / Heyerick
CPO **F** CPO555 170-2



Telemann Christmas Oratorios
Cologne Academy / Willens
CPO **F** CPO555 254-2



JS Bach Christmas Oratorio
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Porpora Il verbo in carne
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Lulier Cantate e Sonate
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Alpha **F** ALPHA406



Having impressed on previous Baroque releases for Erato (Handel's *Partenope* and Philippe Jaroussky's 'Storia di Orfeo' composite, 12/15, 4/17), the Hungarian soprano Emőke Baráth has emerged with her own contract, of which this release is the first fruit. And how nice it is to welcome not a disc of the same old Handel arias from operas she happens to have sung in but a properly worked-out programme focusing on the 17th-century Venetian composer Barbara Strozzi.

Strozzi never wrote an opera, but the tortured love domain she explored in her ariettas and cantatas is an intense one. Baráth sings six of these pieces, setting them alongside a cantata by Antonio Cesti and a group of arias from the opera *Statira, principessa di Persia* by her teacher Francesco Cavalli, and the comparison is a revealing one, the confident public art of the two big-name opera composers throwing into relief Strozzi's more natural emotional truth. The daughter of a poet and librettist, and a regular speaker at his intellectual debating shop, she had no fear of sophisticated literary texts and could respond with honesty, intimacy and a total lack of musical posturing. The affecting falling intervals of her dark laments strike to the heart like a knife, and when there is playfulness it can still work to a serious and wholly appropriate end: 'L'Astratto', the piece that ends the programme, shows a love-letter writer rejecting various artificial styles before arriving at his true message – that it is love that controls him rather than the other way round.

Baráth's voice is strong, bright and clear, innately attractive with crisply enunciated words. One might wish for a wider range of colours, and indeed over time she can seem a little full-on in this music; it might just be that, for the time being at least, it is Cavalli's outgoing operatic world that suits her better. The expert contributions from Il Pomo d'Oro, including short instrumental interludes by Marini and Merula, are typically tight and pingy. **Lindsay Kemp**

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WHAT NEXT?

Do you have a favourite piece of music and want to explore further? Our monthly feature suggests some musical journeys that venture beyond the most familiar works, with some recommended versions. This month, **Peter Quantrill**'s point of departure is ...

Mahler's Symphony No 6 (1904)

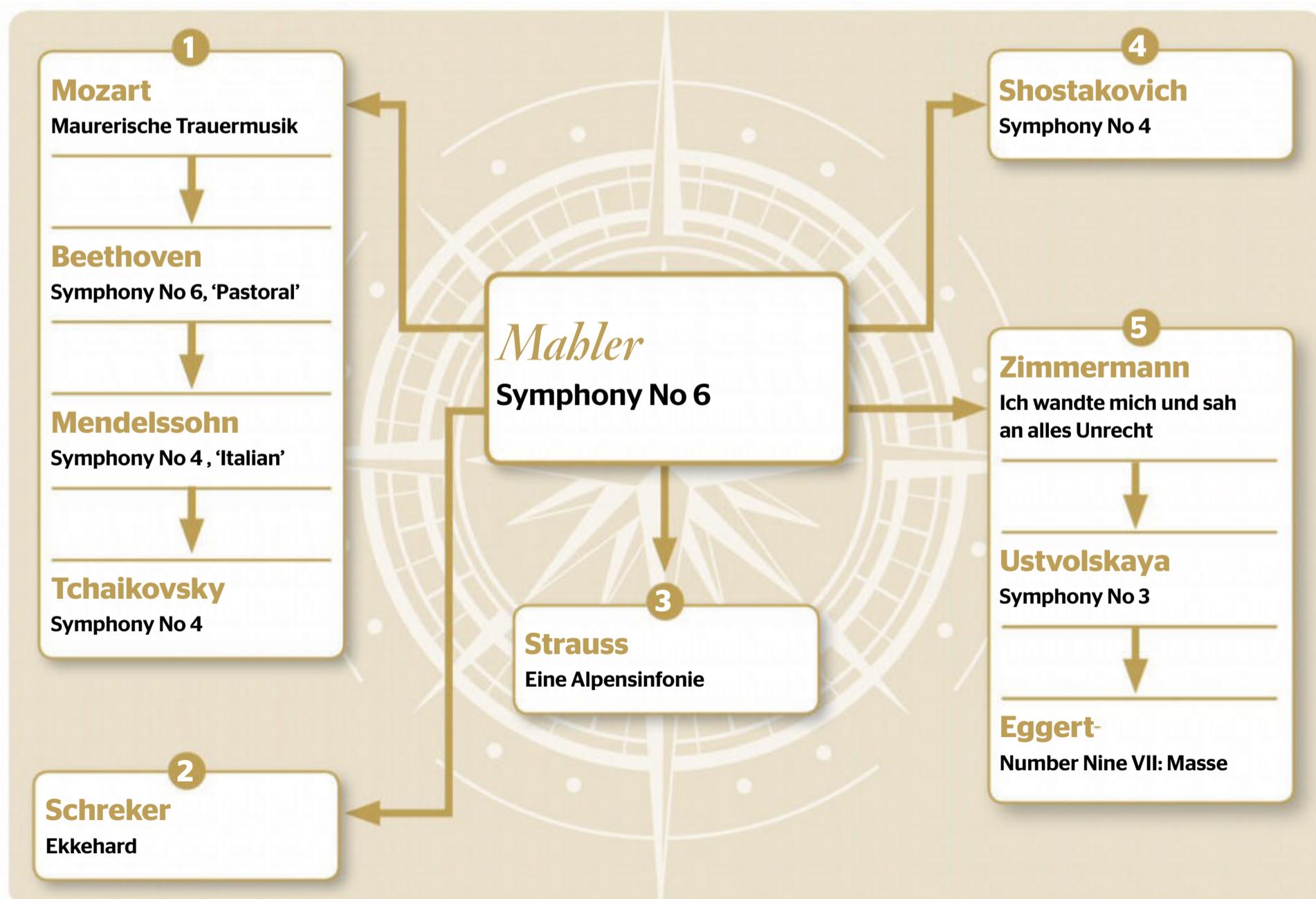
Apparently unable to decide whether its finale was 'a total failure' or 'a cosmos in itself', Otto Klemperer would not touch Mahler's Sixth Symphony. Neither would Bruno Walter. It was among the last of the nine completed symphonies to be issued on disc. In the absence of any record of early performances conducted by Willem Mengelberg, Carl Schuricht or Anton Webern, we might trace the beginnings of a performance tradition for the piece further eastwards, to Russia. As a prophet in a barren land, the music critic Ivan Sollertinsky was unable to square the fatalism of the symphony's goal with Soviet cultural ideology, but its ingenious development of Classical forms, its narrative integration of man and music and its massed orchestration struck a chord with Shostakovich, and thence in

favoured interpreters of the latter's music, most notably Kirill Kondrashin. The Russian Mahler tradition – swift, dynamic, untroubled by faked Viennese sentiment – is upheld by Kondrashin's successor, Greek-Russian Teodor Currentzis.

● **MusicAeterna / Teodor Currentzis** (Sony Classical, 12/18)

1 *Precedents*

Mozart *Maurerische Trauermusik* (1785) Alma Mahler recorded how agitated Mahler was that shortly before the premiere of the Sixth in Essen, the orchestra's organising committee declared that an impromptu prelude should be added to commemorate the local mayor, recently deceased. Sharing conducting duties with the



composer, Richard Strauss duly did the honours with Mozart. In fact, the two works complement each other uncannily well, not least in the nature of their scoring, rich in low woodwind.

● New Philharmonia Orchestra / Otto Klemperer (Warner Classics, 11/65)

Beethoven Symphony No 6, 'Pastoral' (1808) Despite the *Pastoral* Symphony, Mahler's is the only Sixth, wrote Berg to Webern in 1908 – whether disingenuously or carried away with enthusiasm. When Beethoven imagined himself strolling in the woods outside Vienna, he laid down the template for the programme symphony that Berlioz and then Mahler refined. 'Beethoven doesn't invent anything,' observed the publisher Victor Gollancz. 'He perceives something and tries to reproduce it.' The same could be said of both Mahler and Kleiber, who conducts this live 1983 recording.

● Bavarian State Orchestra / Carlos Kleiber (Orfeo, 7/04)

Mendelssohn Symphony No 4, 'Italian' (1833) Mahler was not the first to end a 'journey symphony' in unrelieved A minor. Mendelssohn got there first, with recorded impressions of a stay in Rome – from a Lenten procession at St Peter's in the *Andante con moto*, to the finale's carnival-time Saltarello, which is threaded through a convulsive tarantella. Sir John Barbirolli's 1948 account is supple and beautifully sprung.

● Hallé Orchestra / John Barbirolli (Memoir Classics, 7/48, 11/99)

Tchaikovsky Symphony No 4 (1878) Just as Mahler's Ninth pays homage to the *Pathétique*, so the Sixth revives a Tchaikovskian force of destiny expressed in the most fully symphonic terms by the Fourth. Fate – in all its original, tragic connotations – drives the first movement forwards from its doom-laden fanfare, and re-enters the fray at a crucial point in the finale's battle between frenzied rejoicing and folkloric nostalgia. Strangely few conductors have proved themselves sufficiently in tune with both composers to make those connections, but Claudio Abbado stands pre-eminent among them.

● Vienna Philharmonic / Claudio Abbado (DG, 11/76)

2 Beyond the symphony

Schreker Ekkehard (1903) Skilfully handling a Mahlerian orchestral apparatus (plus organ) contemporary with the Sixth, the 24-year-old Schreker forsakes the winding path of symphonic logic and foreshadows cinematic composition. The first 30 seconds of this tone poem-overture bring a pentatonic curtain-raiser straight out of the Korngold playbook; a solemn liturgical procession; a close-up on the face of the duchess as she claps eyes on the handsome young monk of the title. What's different from Mahler is not so much the stuff of which it's made as the form, the technique and the purpose.

● Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz / Christopher Ward (Capriccio)

3 A different kind of journey

R Strauss Eine Alpensinfonie (1915) In a highly ambiguous tribute to the memory of Mahler, Strauss revisited the Alpine landscapes of the Sixth's *Andante moderato*, where cowbells sound a lost idyll – for a Nietzschean glorification of man in nature. Although both works arguably end in darkness, Mahler's Sixth is a symphonic journey undertaken alone, whereas *Eine Alpensinfonie* notably describes an excursion in company – the difference between Mahler and Strauss in a nutshell. Both men would surely doff their caps to the playing of the Vienna Philharmonic under Seiji Ozawa.

● Vienna Philharmonic / Seiji Ozawa (Philips, 10/97)



Mahler and wife Alma in Basel in 1903 – the year he began writing his Sixth Symphony

4 Reading between the lines, Soviet-style

Shostakovich Symphony No 4 (1936) Although Shostakovich quotes the *Resurrection* Symphony in this, his most Mahlerian symphony, the endgame of the finale negates the previous C major apotheosis and leaves a vacuum of profound darkness and emptiness. Prior to that, parodies of funeral marches and dances find their precedent in Mahler's distortion of provincial idioms in the Scherzo of the Sixth. As the first interpreter of Shostakovich's Fourth, Kondrashin captures like no one else its virtuosity, ambiguity and compelling, Mahlerian sense of the man within his music.

● Moscow Philharmonic / Kyrill Kondrashin (Melodiya, 10/71, 5/89)

5 Knocking on heaven's (or hell's) door

Zimmermann Ich wandte mich und sah an alles Unrecht (1970)

None of Mahler's Austro-German successors embraced his aesthetic of synthetic eclecticism so wholly as did Zimmermann. The fatalistic leave-taking of Mahler's Sixth is amplified and fulfilled with unforgettable pathos in an 'ecclesiastical action'. Through ritualistic speech and recitation – from Ecclesiastes and Mahler's beloved Dostoyevsky – a bass and a pair of speakers reach a state of the blackest pessimism beneath the dignity of song.

● Andreas Schmidt bass West German RSO / Heinz Holliger (ECM, 7/09)

Ustvolskaya Symphony No 3 (1983) A large wooden box is the most controversial component of the orchestra in Mahler's Sixth. It reappears, with variations, in the austere, block-like sonorities of Shostakovich's pupil Ustvolskaya, signifying blows of fate or pleas for mercy, or both, articulated in the Third Symphony by a speaker repeatedly exhorting the work's subtitle, 'Jesus, Messiah, save us!'

● Ural Philharmonic Orchestra / Dmitri Liss (Megadisc)

Eggert Number Nine VII: Masse (2008) Moritz Eggert (b1965) attempts to chew up and spit out his Austro-German symphonic ancestors, Mahler included. 'Mass' describes both ritual and scale, as in just under 20 minutes the piece gathers its considerable energies into a thunderous ostinato and then a cathartic *adagio*. There's even a fourth-wall-breaking clamour in emulation of the close of Berlioz's 'March to the Scaffold', which evidently impressed itself on Mahler.

● Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra / Peter Rundel (Neos, 8/18)

Available to stream at Qobuz, Apple Music and Spotify

Opera



Richard Lawrence enjoys Rameau's *Les fêtes de l'Hymen et de l'Amour*:

'Sadly, we don't see *Canope* arriving in a chariot drawn by crocodiles; but the oriental-style costumes are splendid' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 88**



Mark Pullinger watches an Italian production of Verdi's *Stiffelio*:

'The Bologna chorus are well drilled in what must have been nightmare conditions' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 90**

G Benjamin



Lessons in Love and Violence

Stéphane Degout *bar* King
Barbara Hannigan *sop* Isabel
Gyula Orendt *bar* Gaveston/Stranger
Peter Hoare *ten* Mortimer
Samuel Boden *ten* Boy
Ocean Barrington-Cook *actor* Girl
Jennifer France *sop* Witness 1/Woman 1
Krisztina Szabó *mez* Witness 2/Woman 2
Andri Björn Róbertsson *bass-bar* Witness 3/Madman

Orchestra of the Royal Opera House /

George Benjamin

Stage director Katie Mitchell

Video director Margaret Williams

Opus Arte (DVD) OAI221D; (Blu-ray Disc) OABD7199D
(88 + 5' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1
& LPCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, May 24 & 26, 2018

Extra features: interviews with George Benjamin, Martin Crimp & Katie Mitchell, and Cast gallery
Includes synopsis



How many composers in history could claim that their latest opera had productions booked in six countries before it

had even been seen? That was George Benjamin's good fortune when *Lessons in Love and Violence* was given its premiere last May, such was the reputation of its predecessor, *Written on Skin*.

In many ways this new opera seeks to repeat the earlier success. Benjamin has stayed faithful to his librettist, Martin Crimp, who has written another spare text, dense in suggestive meanings. Some of the same collaborators are back, notably soprano Barbara Hannigan and director Katie Mitchell; and, most important, the opera again explores how a forbidden love can lead to acts of horrific violence, a theme that is evidently close to the creators' hearts.

A sense of *déjà vu* is not necessarily a bad thing. Benjamin and Crimp had already proved that they can produce

work of exceptional quality and that is true again of *Lessons in Love and Violence*. At just 90 minutes, this is an opera of impressive concentration with not a word or note wasted.

Any doubts lie elsewhere. Before the premiere Hannigan let slip that the opera 'isn't a laugh a minute', and she was not joking. Crimp's libretto is based on the downfall of Edward II, but what really interests him is the timeless myth of how power corrupts, and the opera peers into a black hole of morality, from which not the slightest glimmer of hope is allowed to escape.

In the telling of this oppressive story Benjamin and Crimp are as one. Like Crimp's text, the music is a model of clarity on the surface, while suggesting an undercurrent of evil, which wells up powerfully in the interludes. Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* lurks in the background, not least for its interplay of light and darkness, and with Benjamin himself as conductor the orchestral playing is precision-tuned. Katie Mitchell's gleamingly modern production is also all-of-a-piece and has been filmed with an extra camera to eavesdrop on the political scheming from far above the characters' heads.

Everyone in the cast fits perfectly, headed by the double act of King and Gaveston, sung by Stéphane Degout and Gyula Orendt, seemingly two sides of the same person. Hannigan is outstanding as the Queen, who humiliates a delegation of the starving poor in one of the opera's most chilling scenes. Peter Hoare is his dramatically astute self as power-hungry Mortimer.

Nobody in this story is at all sympathetic and that goes even for the King's young son, the well-cast Samuel Boden, who inaugurates the next generation of blood-letting in the closing minutes. The lessons in love and violence are his. Or maybe, as we witness these harrowing events, they are really pointed at us. Here is an opera to chill the blood, but not, I think, one to love. **Richard Fairman**

Bruch

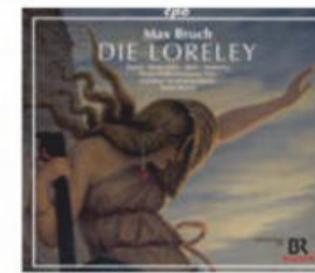
Die Loreley

Michaela Kaune *sop* Lenore
Magdalena Hinterdobler *sop* Bertha
Danae Kontora *sop* Winemaker
Thomas Mohr *ten* Count Otto
Benedikt Eder *bar* Leupold
Jan-Hendrik Rootering *bass-bar* Reinald
Thomas Hamberger *bass-bar* Archbishop of Mainz
Sebastian Campione *bass* Hubert
Prague Philharmonic Choir; Munich Radio
Orchestra / Stefan Blunier

CPO (DVD) CPO777 005-2 (143' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Prinzregententheater, Munich, November 23, 2014

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Emanuel Geibel's libretto to *Die Loreley* is based on an invented saga dating from 1800 which claims a huge rock in the Rhine near Sankt Goarshausen – the site of many a nautical accident – as a physical embodiment of an enchanting female who threw herself into the river having been spurned. Her spirit remains in and around the rock, a perfectly rational explanation for the mysterious echoes that are still heard at the site by passing seamen.

Geibel's text was intended for Mendelssohn, but ended up in the hands of that composer's acolyte Max Bruch, who was in his early twenties when he wrote it (1860-63). We know Bruch was staunchly opposed to Wagner's new language and its 'deceptive cadences'. Sure, you can deride Wagner and worship Mendelssohn. But if you can't conjure up any semblance of the magic that either composer was capable of then you have a theatrical and dramaturgical problem – certainly in a story as fantastical and melodramatic as this.

To a point *Die Loreley* is stodgy, formulaic and awkward, but it gets better as it proceeds. There is some character development in the titular Lenore's



Not a word or note wasted: Barbara Hannigan and Stéphane Degout are outstanding in George Benjamin's *Lessons in Love and Violence*

graduation from lyricism to dramatic desperation to eventual transcendence but musical characterisation is shallow elsewhere. As the booklet notes point out, the libretto offers moments of dark romanticism that could have delivered scenes reminiscent of *Robert le diable* or *Der Freischütz*. Instead, the Grand Scene with Spirits resembles hand-shunted flat scenery in musical form (this is where Bruch might have benefited from one of those 'deceptive cadences'). The multiple Vintner's Choruses are foursquare, even if the Prague Philharmonic Choir do a better job at hiding their lack of enthusiasm than the Munich Radio Orchestra sometimes do elsewhere.

Yet there's some fire in the piece and some beautiful singing on this rendition of it. Blunier handles the angry exchanges at the end of Act 3 with clarity and punch and then milks the final scene – the tenor Otto's suicide into the Rhine following Lenore's return-spurning of him – for all the transcendence Bruch tried to convey without recourse to Wagnerian sleight of hand. Michaela Kaune plots Lenore's journey well but can be a little squeaky at the top of her register. Thomas Mohr's

Otto is eagerly sung in a well supported tenor. There is lovely depth and true control from Magdalena Hinterdobler's Bertha – the aristocrat fiancé Otto is never really into – sung with soul and intimacy even at high volume. Jan-Hendrik Rootering is unsteady as Reinald despite the oak-cask timbre of his voice. Ultimately, none can paper over what's missing in the music. There are scores by this composer that deserve more regular airings, but 'Bruch and the Art of the Theatre' is a thesis that will surely never be written. **Andrew Mellor**

Falla

La vida breve

Nancy Fabiola Herrera *mez*.....Salud
Cristina Faus *mez*.....Grandmother
Aquiles Machado *ten*.....Paco
José Antonio López *bar*.....Uncle Sarvaor
Raquel Lojendio *sop*.....Carmela
Josep Miquel Ramón *bar*.....Manuel
Segundo Falcón *flamenco sngr*.....The Singer
Gustavo Peña *ten*.....A Voice from the Forge
Vicente Coves *gtr* **RTVE Symphony Chorus**,
BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Juanjo Mena
 Chandos © CHAN20032 (62' • DDD)
 Includes libretto and translation



Juanjo Mena's recording of *La vida breve* was made in tandem with a concert performance, one of his last as the BBC Philharmonic's chief conductor, in Manchester last year. It is something of a labour of love – in a booklet note, Mena writes about being 'filled with emotion' at the prospect of its release – and great care has clearly gone into it. While he acknowledges a debt to 'everything Maestro Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos [has] taught us about this masterpiece over the last twenty five years', Mena has also sought to shed new light on the score by painstakingly consulting the original manuscripts together with the detailed 'Notes pour l'exécution' that Falla sent to the director of the New York Met ahead of the 1926 American premiere.

In terms of our understanding of Falla's orchestral and choral writing, the dividends are considerable. Mena prises open textures and sonorities with great subtlety and attention to detail, so that we're fully able



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to appreciate the shifting colours of Falla's writing for strings and woodwind, much indebted to Dukas and Debussy, and his refined yet telling use of brass and percussion. The playing immaculately blends clarity with sensuousness, while the Coro de la Radio e Televisión Española sing with admirable warmth of tone. Their counterpoint in the big Act 1 'Intermedio' is scrupulously clear, where it can sometimes blur. Mena's fondness for detail is particularly apparent in the scene with the street vendors, who sound like folk singers as Falla intended, rather than operatic voices wafting in the distance.

Yet at times it all feels fractionally too considered. *La vida breve* gazes not only at French Impressionism but also at the confrontative emotions of *verismo*, and Mena's performance, sadly, lacks dramatic bite when placed beside its major rivals. His choice of spacious tempos does indeed echo Frühbeck de Burgos's 1965 EMI recording (Warner Classics, 3/66), in contrast to García Navarro's altogether edgier 1978 LSO performance (DG, 11/78 – nla), but he never quite achieves either Frühbeck's brooding sense of unease or Navarro's darker, more expressionistic fire. Even the Act 2 dances, done with fastidious elegance, seem genteel in comparison with Frühbeck's exuberance and Navarro's hectic exhilaration.

Mena's cast, similarly, is not quite as good as the competition. Nancy Fabiola Herrera sounds sumptuous as Salud with her warm tone and full upper registers, though the flamenco turns in '¡Vivan los que rien!' could be a bit more precise. Yet beside Victoria de los Ángeles (sorrow incarnate for Frühbeck) or Teresa Berganza (frighteningly intense with Navarro), she seems relatively disengaged until the final catastrophe approaches. Aquiles Machado's swaggering Paco starts out well but develops a pulse in his voice under pressure, and is no match for Carlo Cossuta (Frühbeck) or José Carreras (Navarro). It's worth hearing, nevertheless, for the insights Mena brings to bear on Falla's powers of orchestration, but to get the full measure of the work you need to go elsewhere. My preference is for Navarro, though Frühbeck de Burgos's recording remains a magnificent achievement that serves Falla's opera equally well. **Tim Ashley**

Offenbach



'Colorature'

Les bavards - Ce sont d'étranges personnages.

Les bergers - Ouverture. **Boule de neige** -

Allons! Couché; Je suis du pays vermeil;

Souvenance. **Les contes d'Hoffmann** - Belle nuit, ô nuit d'amour (Berceuse)^a; Les oiseaux

dans la charmille. **Fantasio** - Cachons l'ennui de mon âme; Voilà toute la ville en fête. **Un mari à la porte** - J'entends, ma belle. **Mesdames de la Halle** - Quel bruit et quel tapage. **Orphée aux Enfers** - La mort m'apparaît souriante. **Le roi Carotte** - Le voilà ... C'est bien lui. **Robinson Crusoé** - Conduisez-moi vers celui que j'adore. **Vert-Vert** - Les plus beaux vers sont toujours fades. **Le voyage dans la lune** - Je suis nerveuse

Jodie Devos sop ^a**Adèle Charvet** mez

Munich Radio Orchestra / Laurent Campellone

Alpha ALPHA437 (61' • DDD)

Includes texts and translations



There's no getting away from the fact that an entire album of wall-to-wall Offenbachian coloratura, a festival of the *chanteuse d'agilité* popping high Ds and E flats and even straight Es like they were going out of fashion, is not everyone's idea of perfect heaven – especially without the context and counterbalance of the complete operettas, most of which now languish in obscurity awaiting a kindly revival. The idea of dipping into a collection such as this (as one might a box of luxury chocolates) would be more realistic to some – myself included.

But the exponent here – Jodie Devos – is a charming and devilishly virtuoso singer and if anyone can make a case for polishing off the entire collection in one sitting it is her. Plus one cannot ever underestimate the influential genius of Offenbach, whose satirical touch, his way with comedy and derision and the obligatory high-kicking *buffo* elements, is repeatedly offset with the tender and the beguiling. A quiet way of being showy, if you like.

The main thing to say about Devos – and her thoroughly idiomatic partner-in-frolic, Laurent Campellone – is that she (and this is a huge compliment) delivers all that is required of her, and more, with the apparent ease of one who knows how important it is to conceal the difficulty. The real kicker with this album is the way in which number after number springs its surprises. The vocal pyrotechnics are artfully designed to make one's jaw hit the floor.

So Devos kick-starts proceedings with the first of three numbers from *Boule de neige* (unfamiliar perchance?) in which a ubiquitous Olga tells of an exotic land 'where the gazelle bounds, where the hummingbird glitters in the golden rays of the sun' and does so with the explosive glee of a bottle of bubbly that has been vigorously shaken. Her first D above top C

is delivered. Then there is *Vert-Vert* and a wonderfully cynical number in which the show-off chanteuse – this is a song about a singer – brazenly mocks her uncultivated audiences while handing out the popping-candy they so crave.

From a clutch of waltz songs are two that caught my ear: one from *Un mari à la porte* and another from *Robinson Crusoé*, both eminently catchy and high-wire brilliant. The tunes are, of course, delicious and after one hearing I can't get the refrain from the *Les bavards* number out of my head. Personally, because I am a sucker for ballads, my favourites are Elsbeth's Romance from *Fantasio* (recently revived in the UK) – one to revisit again and again (a number sitting squarely in the domain of the fully fledged lyric soprano) – and the 'Romance des fleurs' from *Le roi Carotte*, whose vocal line beguiles and charms every which way.

The two big 'hits' from *Les contes d'Hoffmann* are included, of course. I could have done without yet another Barcarolle (Devos joined here by mezzo Adèle Charvet) but hearing Devos dispatch Olympia's corker of a showstopper – this doll never needs rewinding (or new batteries) – will likely leave a smile on your face for the rest of the day. **Edward Seckerson**

Puccini

Madama Butterfly



Maria José Siri sop **Madama Butterfly**

Bryan Hymel ten **Pinkerton**

Carlos Álvarez bar **Sharpless**

Annalisa Stroppa mez **Suzuki**

Carlo Bosi ten **Goro**

Costantino Finucci bass-bar **Prince Yamadori**

Nicole Brandolini mez **Kate Pinkerton**

Abramo Rosalen bass **Bonze**

Gabriele Sagona bass **Imperial Commissioner**

Romano Dal Zovo bass **Registrar**

Chorus and Orchestra of La Scala, Milan / Riccardo Chailly

Stage director **Alvis Hermanis**

Video director **Patrizia Carmine**

Decca 074 3982DH2;

074 3985DH (167' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HS MA5.1, DTS5.1 & LPCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at La Scala, Milan, December 7, 2016

Includes synopsis



The premiere of *Madama Butterfly* at La Scala, Milan, in 1904 was famously one of operatic history's great flops. So great, meanwhile, was the runaway success of the revised version Puccini swiftly

produced for a performance in Brescia just a few months later that any desire to restage the original has usually been seen as eccentric, unnecessary, or both.

Not so with Riccardo Chailly. And the conductor clearly knows his onions when it comes to *Butterflies*, weighing up the different versions in a booklet interview before concluding that the original version is the best. And that's what he conducts – fabulously – here in Alvis Hermanis's stylish, traditional production, which opened La Scala's 2016-17 season.

It comes lots of additional background material in Act 1, while the rest of the opera makes up just one long Act 2. Out goes Pinkerton's 'Addio, fiorito asil', along with any final sympathy you might have felt for him (here with the Christian names 'Francis Blummy' rather than 'Benjamin Franklin'). We get more of his American wife, as well as several moments where we veer off from the familiar into the unknown. But one comes away, if not feeling that this version is better than those we normally see, then certainly not finding it any worse – and somewhat baffled as to how it could have flopped so catastrophically (that failure was in fact as much to do with politics and business as art).

It's hard to imagine, though, that the orchestral playing or conducting that night came close to what Chailly achieves here with his Milan band, beautifully paced and tender, with the sheer invention and quality of the music shining reliably through. It's carefully controlled, too, so that we never risk toppling over into excess. He's assembled a fine cast, too. Maria José Siri doesn't gain much from the heavy geisha make-up and wispy hand gestures that are imposed upon her, and her girlish routine in Act 1 never feels natural, but she's a fine artist in the grand tradition and sings powerfully and movingly in the evening's second half, especially in the extended final scene.

Bryan Hymel's Pinkerton is sung brightly and breezily, and well acted: likeable, no doubt, but cursed with a careless, unthinking entitlement that suddenly feels especially relevant. Carlos Álvarez is a kindly, warm Sharpless, Annalisa Stroppa an attentive Suzuki, although her abstract emoting won't be to all tastes. Nor, arguably, will be the unreflective japonaiserie of the staging. Nevertheless, it's certainly a handsome show, with plenty of cherry blossom and pretty images projected on a paper screen. Above all it makes a powerful, persuasive case for Puccini's first thoughts on his great tearjerker. **Hugo Shirley**

Rameau



Les fêtes de l'Hymen et de l'Amour

Claire Debono sop..... Orthésie/Orie

Jeffrey Thompson ten..... Osiris/Aruéris

Ingrid Perruche sop..... Myrrine/Memphis

François Lis bass..... Canope

Opera Lafayette Chorus and Orchestra /

Ryan Brown

Stage directors Catherine Turocy,

Anuradha Nehru and **Seán Curran**

Naxos 2 110393

(148' • NTSC • 16:9 • PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at The John F Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington DC,

October 6, 2014

Includes synopsis



The Festivities of Hymen and Cupid was the second collaboration between Rameau and the librettist Louis de Cahusac. It began life as a *ballet héroïque* in three entrées, but before it could be submitted to the Paris Opéra it was taken over to form part of the celebrations marking the wedding of the Dauphin Louis (son of Louis XV, subsequently father of Louis XVI) to his second wife, Maria Josepha of Saxony. With the addition of a prologue, it was performed at Versailles on March 15, 1747.

The original title was *Les dieux d'Égypte* ('The Egyptian Gods'). Each entrée ends with the wedding of a god: Osiris, Canope and Aruéis (Horus) respectively. In the prologue, Cupid is depressed at losing his power to Hymen, the god of marriage; Hymen arrives, the two gods are reconciled, and they rejoice in the royal union. As in *The Magic Flute*, to take a familiar example, the Egyptian setting provided an opportunity for references to freemasonry: in the first entrée, Osiris brings enlightenment to the savage Amazons; the third features competitive games in honour of Isis.

Although there are of course a lot of dances, they are not irrelevant interludes: Cahusac was skilled in devising what he called *ballets figurés*, dances that are intrinsic to the story. Some are short, played in rapid succession, which makes the frequent interruptions of applause in this production rather irritating. Sometimes the stage directions are followed, as when Cupid gives Hymen two golden arrows and they exchange torches; at other times the dancing seems abstract, but it's hard to be sure as the camera often cuts away from the action to show the orchestra. The piece is fully staged, but with no scenery; conductor and orchestra are behind the singers and

dancers, and the chorus – singing from scores – is in the balcony.

Cahusac set much store by special effects. We don't see the overflowing of the Nile, but Rameau's depiction is vivid enough: scurrying descending scales in the orchestra, with a double chorus and two bass soloists. Nor, sadly, do we see Canope arriving in a chariot drawn by crocodiles. But the costumes – in a sort of timeless oriental style – are splendid. So, as ever, is Rameau's writing for the dances and the choral numbers. The solos move seamlessly between recitative and arioso. The airs include a prayer to Cupid, 'Veille Amour', expressively sung by Ingrid Perruche, and a tender number for an Egyptian shepherd, 'Ma bergère fuyait l'amour', with musette accompaniment: Kyle Bielfield sings it gracefully, with lightly touched top Cs (sounding B flat).

The cast boasts two more excellent *hautes-contre* in Aaron Sheehan and Jeffrey Thompson. Claire Debono occasionally sounds uncomfortable at the top of her register, but it's not too serious. Ryan Brown, using the new critical edition by Thomas Soury, conducts the Opera Lafayette Orchestra and Chorus with both vigour and sensitivity. I wish I could be as enthusiastic about the balance of the recording: the orchestra sometimes fades away alarmingly, and the timpani are much too prominent. But overall this is well worth acquiring, to set alongside Le Concert Spirituel and Hervé Niquet on CD (Glossa, 12/14), which has the advantage of a booklet that includes the stage directions with the libretto. **Richard Lawrence**

Stradella

La Doriclea

Emóke Baráth sop..... Doriclea

Giuseppina Bridelli mez..... Lucinda

Xavier Sabata counterten..... Fidalbo

Gabriella Martellacci contr..... Delfina

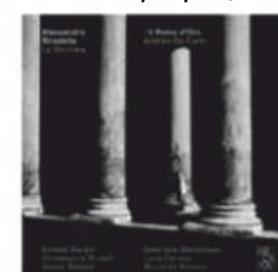
Luca Cervoni ten..... Celindo

Riccardo Novaro bar..... Giraldo

Il Pomo d'Oro / Andrea De Carlo

Arcana ③ A454 (3h 8' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



In 1938 a manuscript copy of *La Doriclea* was found in Rieti (a small town in the Sabine hills) by a local organist who then kept it completely hidden. This premiere recording benefits from recent research by Lucia Adelaide di Nicola; the present whereabouts of the manuscript and the identity of the edition used are not explained. Arnaldo

Morelli's essay speculates that perhaps Stradella's comedy was intended for a private production at an aristocratic residence in or near Rome during the early 1670s, and that the libretto might have been written by the Roman nobleman Flavio Orsini.

The plot is an implausible web of amorous entanglements. Doriclea agrees to elope with Fidalbo but their plan is thwarted by a series of misunderstandings that overlap with the quarrelling Celindo and Lucinda – initially there is confusion over identities in the darkness of night (at the end of Act 1), and the problem is worsened by Doriclea disguising herself as a man ('Lindoro') for the rest of the opera in order to test Fidalbo's fidelity; she thereby attracts unwanted interest from Lucinda (who wishes to punish Celindo by having a fling and yet rebuffs advances from Fidalbo, who believes Doriclea has forsaken him and so hopes a new lover will cheer him up). Upon the brink of attempted murder, the eventual denouement resolves jealousy and embarrassment between the four upper-class lovers, partly facilitated by the panicked interruption of the ageing spinster Delfina, whose quest to find a husband finds success in the long-suffering servant Giraldo.

A multitude of little short arias and duets are performed with zesty vibrancy by Il Pomo d'Oro, conducted by Andrea De Carlo. Two violinists embellish numerous short ritornellos elaborately, and the continuo group is richly arrayed. Emőke Baráth's Doriclea and Giuseppina Bridelli's Lucinda are both crystalline and sensual. The steadfast Celindo's laments in response to Lucinda's unwarranted scorn are sung dulcetly by Luca Cervoni. Xavier Sabata has vocal frailties but his subtly shaded arias convey Fidalbo's changeable adoration for Doriclea and Lucinda. Stradella seems to have had fun writing the wittily inventive music for the lower-class characters, sung with humour and agility by Gabriella Martellacci and Riccardo Novaro; one

of the highlights is the sleepy Giraldo's song to rouse himself – rather than riches and beautiful women, his idea of happiness is chilled wine and a meat pie. **David Vickers**

R Strauss

Daphne

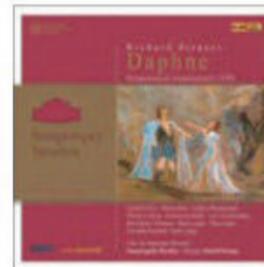
Gudrun Wuestemann sop.....	Daphne
Helmut Schindler ten.....	Apollo
Gottlob Frick bass.....	Peneios
Werner Liebing ten.....	Leukippos
Helena Rott mez.....	Gaea
Arno Schellenberg bar.....	Shepherd I
Karl-Heinz Thomann ten.....	Shepherd II
Kurt Legner bass.....	Shepherd III
Theo Adam bass.....	Shepherd IV
Elisabeth Reichelt sop.....	Maiden I
Ruth Lange contr.....	Maiden II

Dresden State Opera Chorus:

Dresden Staatskapelle / Rudolf Kempe

Profil (F) ② PH07038 (134' • ADD)

Recorded live 1950



The more I listen to it, the more *Daphne* strikes me as among Strauss's most moving and heartbreakingly works: a return to nature, to an idealised Greece; an attempt to seek solace in art completed at a time of increasing barbarity. Originally coupled with the problematic *Friedenstag* at its 1937 premiere, it soon started to stand on its own two feet: freed from its coupling but left as a slightly awkward one-acter.

The work's discography remains modest. It's now over 12 years since Semyon Bychkov's fine Decca recording joined those by Bernard Haitink (Warner/EMI) and the classic live 1964 Vienna account conducted by the work's dedicatee, Karl Böhm (DG, 7/65^R).

Böhm was at the helm for the premiere in Dresden's Semperoper and recorded a couple of extracts with two singers from

that first cast. Those are included on the present set as a coupling for a complete recording of Dresden's second staging of the piece, under a young Rudolf Kempe. And though this might be Vol 4 of the lavishly – if somewhat haphazardly – presented 'Semperoper Edition', in 1950 the city's famous theatre lay in ruins; this broadcast comes instead from the company's temporary home in the Staatstheater.

It's undoubtedly an important document. Unlike Böhm, Kempe conducts the score without cuts, and he brings to it a wonderful sense of pacing, striking an effective balance between drama and Apollonian serenity. He has a fine cast of singers, too, many largely unknown today. The young Gottlob Frick stands out as truly god-like Peneios, and Helmut Schindler is an unusually youthful and bright-sounding Apollo. Gudrun Wuestemann's Daphne, no doubt on the soubrettish side and occasionally veering off pitch, is nevertheless noble and moving.

But, alas, this release is likely to appeal only to the hardest of collectors. The sound captured by the radio engineers is rough in the extreme, and prone to distortion at the slightest excursion above *mf*. The opening pages are an ordeal, with plenty of wayward tuning, and there's a whole section where we suddenly get a layer of extra hiss. There's plenty of stage noise, too – the shepherds' first entry is accompanied by a Mahlerian battery of rustic bells.

The ear adjusts, though, and the sound seems to me to improve as we get closer to Daphne's final scene, performed beautifully. But to return to Böhm's set is to feel the fog lift, to see once more Strauss's musical landscape in all its colour. And for all their virtues, Kempe's ensemble cast largely can't match the glamour of Böhm's big-name line-up. This is undoubtedly an important document, though, and well worth exploring, not least for the generous bonuses. **Hugo Shirley**

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Verdi**Stiffelio**

Luciano Ganci ten.....Stiffelio
Maria Katzarava sop.....Lina
Emanuele Cordaro bass.....Jorg
Francesco Landolfi bar.....Stankar
Cecilia Bernini mez.....Dorotea
Giovanni Sala ten.....Raffaele di Leuthold
Blagoj Nacoski ten.....Federico di Frengel
Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro Comunale, Bologna / Guillermo García Calvo

Stage director Graham Vick**Video director** Daniele de Piano

Naxos (F) 2 110590; (F) NBD0084V (119' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Teatro Farnese, Parma, Italy, October 2017

Includes synopsis



Stiffelio has often been appended the tagline 'Verdi's most unjustly neglected opera'. It comes immediately before his *Rigoletto-Trovatore-Traviata* trio of masterpieces, which launched an illustrious second half to his career. It enjoyed a revival of fortunes in the early 1990s with new productions by Elijah Moshinsky at Covent Garden and Giancarlo del Monaco at the Metropolitan Opera, featuring José Carreras and Plácido Domingo, respectively, in the title-role. Yet it has never really achieved popular status, partly due to it lacking a 'hit number' and partly down to its unspectacular plot about a Protestant minister who discovers his wife's adulterous affair.

Its finale, in which Stiffelio forgives his wife from the pulpit, reading the 'Let him who is without sin cast the first stone' passage from St John's Gospel, is undeniably powerful in the right hands. Whether those right hands are Graham Vick's, I'm not so sure. His 'immersive' production at the 2017 Verdi Festival in Parma seeks to sensationalise the plot by bringing it into the present day. Stiffelio is a charismatic preacher, leading a cult proclaiming the sanctity of marriage, but he faces opposition. Women's rights protesters disrupt his book launch and homosexuals in pink T-shirts embrace, only to be beaten by church officials. But in seeking contemporary relevance, Vick turns Stiffelio into a divisive figure in society which goes against the grain of his character as revered shepherd of his flock.

The action takes place in Parma's Teatro Farnese, in which the stalls seats have been ripped out. The audience enters as the Overture is being played, the Orchestra

del Teatro Comunale di Bologna tucked away in a corner, and mills around mobile platforms on which the singers perform. The chorus is dotted among them, as are extras who snog, scrap and convulse wildly on the ground.

Vick's cast enter the spirit admirably, even if there aren't any outstanding voices to savour. Luciano Ganci has a fine, open tenor and conveys the angst of Stiffelio effectively. The Mexican soprano Maria Katzarava sings Lina, his adulterous wife, passionately albeit lacking control in her upper register. Francesco Landolfi is a reliable Stankar, Lina's father who does his best to protect his son-in-law from discovering the truth; his stoic baritone suits this 'old soldier'. Giovanni Sala convinces as the randy Raffaele, still chasing after Lina. The Bologna chorus are well drilled in what must have been nightmare conditions, dotted around the stalls, following the conductor Guillermo García Calvo's beat via a series of video screens. It's something of a miracle that there are relatively few coordination problems.

What was, by all accounts, an involving experience translates quite well to the small screen, but this is not a production that is going to bear repeated viewing.

Mark Pullinger

Vivaldi**Il Giustino**

Delphine Galou contr.....Giustino
Emőke Baráth sop.....Arianna
Silke Gäng contr.....Anastasio
Verónica Cangemi sop.....Leocasta
Emiliano Gonzalez Toro ten.....Vitaliano
Arianna Vendittelli sop.....Amanzio
Alessandro Giangrande counterten/ten.....Andronico/Polidarte
Rahel Maas sop.....Fortuna

Accademia Bizantina / Ottavio Dantone

Naïve (M) ③ OP30571 (3h 8' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



First performed in Rome in 1724, *Il Giustino* is among the most beautiful and cogent of Vivaldi's operas. Using a libretto by Niccolò Beregan that was also set by Albinoni and Handel, it deals, loosely and somewhat fancifully, with the rise to power of the sixth-century Byzantine emperor Justin I, who began life as a ploughman before embarking on the successful military career that brought him to the attention of the imperial authorities. Like many Baroque operas, the work is structured

after the fashion of a Renaissance epic, in which the erotic and the political repeatedly intersect and supernatural powers govern the lives of men.

Watched over by the goddess Fortuna, the heroic Giustino saves the life of the emperor Anastasio's sister Leocasta when she is attacked by a bear, and is subsequently sent to Constantinople, where he becomes the protagonist of a series of interlocking narratives that expose the empire as being threatened both from without (by the tyrannical Vitaliano, who is obsessively in love with Anastasio's wife Arianna) and within (Anastasio's duplicitous general Amanzio, who wants the imperial throne for himself). Though intricate, the complex web of plots and counterplots is carefully laid out and resolved, with none of the prolixity that hampers some of Vivaldi's operas.

In a booklet note for his new recording, Ottavio Dantone argues for the dramatic validity of Vivaldi's operas in general, and backs up his case with a performance of fiery energy and tremendous élan. The score is part *pasticcio* ('Spring' from *The Four Seasons* ushers in Fortuna's appearance on the scene), but the work is so much more than a collection of bravura arias, and Dantone finds a strong sense of unity and purpose within it. Rhythms are crisp and incisive, textures sensuous and often startlingly immediate. There's plenty of swagger and bravado in the Accademia Bizantina's playing, and some superb obbligatos, particularly the psaltery, exquisitely played by Margit Übellacker, which accompanies Giustino's beautiful monologue at the close of the second act.

Recitatives, meanwhile, are sharply characterised and seamlessly integrated with the arias, the latter thrillingly done. Delphine Galou, smoky in tone and wonderfully secure over the role's colossal range, really makes us believe in Giustino's innate nobility and moral integrity. Silke Gäng's warm mezzo and Emőke Baráth's silvery soprano blend beautifully together in the duets for Anastasio and Arianna. Baráth sounds ravishing in her arias. Gäng, mindful that the much-recorded 'Vedrò con mio diletto' expresses the thoughts of a man on the eve of battle, sings it with striking urgency, where most interpreters are apt to be reflective.

As Vitaliano, meanwhile, Emiliano Gonzalez Toro, with his spectacular coloratura, is little short of sensational. Arianna Vendittelli captures Amanzio's deceitful, Iago-like charm to perfection, while Verónica Cangemi makes a coolly sensual Leocasta. My only qualm, albeit minor, concerns Alessandro Giangrande, who plays Vitaliano's brother Andronico



Splendid costumes: Rameau's opera-ballet *Les Fêtes de l'Hymen et de l'Amour* from Opera Lafayette – see review on page 88

as a countertenor but sings his sidekick Polidarte as a tenor: he sounds somewhat more comfortable as the latter. A handful of sound effects have been added to aid the dramatic tension: a roaring bear that hits the floor with a resounding thump when clobbered by Giustino; and a grunting sea monster that Vitaliano at one point conjures up to terrify Arianna. The whole thing is hugely enjoyable, consistently engaging and highly recommended. **Tim Ashley**

'A te, o cara'

Bellini *I puritani* - A te, o cara **Donizetti** *Anna Bolena* - Vivi tu, te ne scongiuro. *Don Pasquale* - Sogno soave e casto. *Don Sebastiano* - Deserto in terra. *L'elisir d'amore* - Quanto e bella; Una furtiva lagrima. *La favorita* - Spirto gentil. *La fille du régiment* - Ah mes amis; Pour me rapprocher de Marie. *Lucia di Lammermoor* - Fra poco a me ricovero **Verdi** *Rigoletto* - Parmi veder le lagrime

Stephen Costello ten Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra / Constantine Orbelian

Delos © DE3541 (50' • DDD)

Includes texts and translations



The American tenor Stephen Costello needs no introduction, but he's

re-introducing himself anyway with this new disc of *bel canto* calling-card arias, just as he is moving on to heavier roles such as *Don José*. He's also emerging from some professional and personal challenges – nothing that directly endangered his vocal mechanism, though a tonsillectomy came close. So it's gratifying to report that 10-plus years after his 2007 Metropolitan Opera debut, the 38-year-old Costello sounds as vocally fresh as a newcomer but with a greater understanding of text and style that puts him on new artistic ground. The nothing-fancy production values of the Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra under Constantine Orbelian suitably frame the emotional directness of the performances.

Costello's greater colouristic range is apparent in every selection, allowing recitatives to speak with more light and shade, as in 'Tombe degli avi i miei' from *Lucia di Lammermoor* but especially in the cadential climax to the *Anna Bolena* cavatina, 'Vivi tu, te ne scongiuro'.

The most dramatic development – darker colours and the vocal weight that comes with them – can be too much of a good thing. Like Lawrence Brownlee, Costello flexes his vocal muscles too readily in this studio-recording setting, where nuance speaks louder than volume. As impressive as his sustained vocal tension is in the album's title aria, 'A te, o cara', Costello

starts out so stentorian that he leaves himself too little room to build.

On the language front, no current tenor can match Luciano Pavarotti's intuitive handling of Italian text, though Costello has moments of great emotional specificity without resorting to the interpretative overkill that sometimes afflicts Vittorio Grigolo. Also, Costello's voice readily contours itself to the French of arias from *La fille du régiment*. High notes are healthier and more full-bodied than before, though one does hear the technical mechanics that Juan Diego Flórez so artfully disguises on a good night. Amid such comparisons, one happily returns to Costello's warmth of tone and the wonderfully scaled vibrato that never disturbs the long-term vocal line. His strong musical engagement especially gives continuity to the potentially tiresome 'Deserto in terra' from *Don Sebastiano*.

Two arias that forever put lyric tenors to the test are bravely included. Costello nails the multiple high Cs in 'Ah mes amis, quel jour de fête' from *La fille du régiment*, though what handily puts him across the finish line is the overall characterisation and larger sense of musical intent behind the vocal athleticism. And Costello's elastic moulding of the texts and phrases in the much-recorded 'Una furtiva lagrima' from *L'elisir d'amore* reflects his deepening artistry. **David Patrick Stearns**

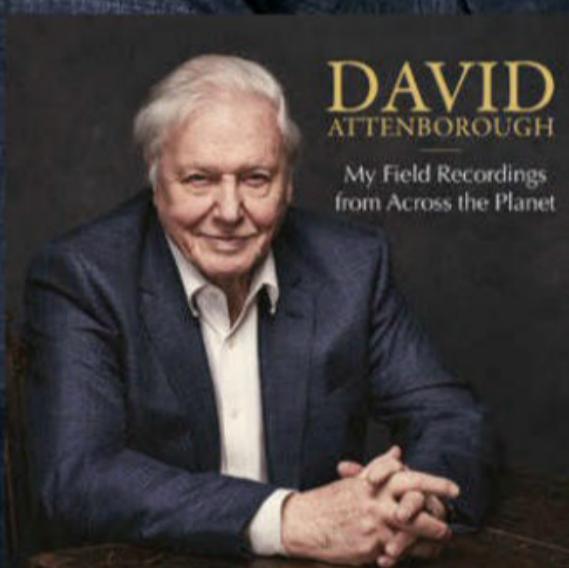
*“While I was theoretically looking for pythons,
in the evenings I would record different types of music...”*

David Attenborough reflects on his time filming *Zoo Quest* between 1954-1963

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THE WORLD MUSIC COLLECTOR

The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

Jazz

Kenny Werner

The Space

Pirouet Ⓜ PIT3196



The name of Werner's latest album derives from a chapter in his famous self-help book *Effortless Mastery*, whereby 'the space' is the mental/spiritual freedom from which spontaneous music can flow. The enclosed results are lyrical, inventive, heavily marked by various generations of European classical music and brilliantly executed, as one might expect. The 16-minute title-track is actually a suite of several sections that are (as far as I can tell) unrelated to each other, and it may be that a later track, 'Fifth Movement', should be heard in conjunction with them. But, as well as the original material and a couple of song standards (an out-of-tempo 'You

Must Believe In Spring' and the only groovy item, 'If I Should Lose You'), there is also Werner's version of Keith Jarrett's 'Encore From Tokyo', which seems more laidback than its originator (and also spares the listener any self-indulgent exclamations). Two tunes by Pirouet's engineer/producer Jason Seizer constitute the remainder of the repertoire.

Brian Priestley

Mike Westbrook Orchestra

Catania

Westbrook Records Ⓜ WR004



A record of a remarkable free festival, not previously released but recently reprised in that the Westbrooks returned only last November to Catania, playing much of the music recorded here. Of

course, there were differences in performances 26 years apart, not least reflecting the cruel loss over the years of Peter Saberton, Dave Plews and Danilo Terenzi. Saberton's piano weaves throughout the 150 minutes-plus of music captured here. The setlist reflects much of the Westbrook's repertoire: their extraordinary expressions of Blake are revealed in Phil Minton's earth-rending 'Long John Brown' and the visionary 'I See Thy Form'. In contrast, Kate Westbrook brings her theatricality to 'Alabamasong', more than able to go *mano a mano*, well, tonsil to tonsil, with the histrionic genius of Minton. The sound is superb, the coughing and car horns adding to the open-air ambience of Sicilian street music. The restoration and editing was about Jon Hiseman's last job before his sad passing, and the recording is understandably dedicated to him. **Andy Robson**

World Music

Cimbalom Brothers

Testvériség (Brotherhood)

Fonó Records Ⓜ FA416-2



Slightly confusingly, the two Hungarian cimbalom players in this quartet are not brothers – I suspect one cimbalom player is enough in any family – but the band comprises two pairs of brothers. The two cimbalom maestros are Jenő Lisztes, who has played with violinist Roby Lakatos for years and appeared in the BBC Proms last summer with the Budapest Festival Orchestra, and Balázs Unger, charismatic leader of the Cimbaliband. Both create a blur of sticks as their hands fly with pinpoint accuracy over the four-octave-plus range of the concert cimbalom. Gergő Unger plays guitar as well as *koboz* and *tambura* (lute), while László Lisztes plays

double bass. The repertoire ranges from the flamboyant Gypsy jazz of the opener 'Djangodance' through the lyrical and delicate 'Tiszán Innen' – a tune familiar from Kodály's popular *Háry János* Suite – to Jewish tunes and repertoire from Aladár Rácz (1886–1858), the Kossuth Prize-winning master of the cimbalom. It's a thrilling virtuoso ride and there aren't many cimbalom albums better than this, although it's essentially a showpiece rather than anything deeper. **Simon Broughton**

Bassekou Kouyaté & Ngoni ba

Miri

Outhere Records Ⓜ OH032CD



One of the principal instruments of Mali's *griot* storytelling tradition is the *ngoni* (lute), and more than anyone else,

Bassekou Kouyaté is responsible for ensuring that the instrument maintains its place both within traditional circles and among lovers of contemporary roots music. On his fifth album he is in a more reflective mood than on his previous release and *Miri* sees him focus on love, friendship, family and true values during times of crisis. The title means 'Dream' or 'Contemplation' in the Bamana language, and the album is certainly a beautifully realised work of traditional and mostly melancholic acoustic music. On 'Wele Ni' Bassekou plays his *ngoni* with a bottleneck, creating a slide effect that makes his instrument sound distinctly Oriental. Moroccan musician Majid Bekkas adds *oud* and vocals on the opening track, 'Kanougnon'; and on the magnificent Africando-sounding track 'Wele Cuba', singer Yasel González Rivera adds a great Latin vocal. **Martin Sinnock**

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Riccardo Chailly: The Symphony Edition

Richard Osborne looks back over the Italian conductor's 40 years on Decca

Retrospectives are generally best when a musician's 'work' is complete. Which is not to deny the interest of a well-chosen anniversary edition, assuming that it is more than a randomly sourced 'pile it high, sell it cheap' device for recycling back-catalogue. Released to mark the 40th anniversary of Riccardo Chailly's association with the Decca record label, this Chailly 'Symphony Edition' has some interesting biographical and artistic strands, though few, I suspect, which the compilers had in mind.

The repertory consists of single cycles of the symphonies of Beethoven, Bruckner and Mahler, pairs of cycles of the symphonies of Schumann and Brahms, and a good deal of symphonic, quasi-symphonic and non-symphonic infill that has no particular theme or focus.

Chailly's association with Decca did, indeed, begin in 1978-79 with a famously powerful account of Rossini's *Guglielmo Tell* (the opera's unauthentic Italian version) with Luciano Pavarotti as Arnold. Chailly was 25 at the time, an apprentice opera conductor possessed of larger orchestral ambitions, though with no firmed-up recording contract. That came two years later and was not with Decca – the famously pioneering independent label founded by Edward Lewis in 1929 – but with PolyGram, the powerful Philips/Deutsche Grammophon conglomerate that had acquired Decca within days of Sir Edward's death in January 1980.

By chance, Chailly had already recorded for both PolyGram labels. In 1979 Philips engaged him to record Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang* and *Scottish* symphonies with the LPO and LSO in London, a pair of rather studious-sounding performances, both of which appear in the new anthology. Meanwhile, he had been invited to take over from an ailing Seiji Ozawa a recording

of Massenet's *Werther* with Plácido Domingo in the title-role (DG, 11/79).

Chailly had other irons in the fire before, in December 1980, Decca dispatched him to Vienna to record Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony with the Philharmonic. This was hardly wise. With the 27-year-old Italian showing little feel for a symphony about which the gentlemen of the Philharmonic had long entertained their own reservations, the end-product is a performance that mixes indifference and aggression in almost bewildering proportions.

Truth to tell, Chailly's is a Mahler cycle like no other on record

Decca entrusted more Tchaikovsky to Chailly, one of a number of initiatives which prompted Ivan March to remark in these columns that Chailly was being asked to record too much too soon.

A measure of stability was established when he secured the conductorship of Berlin's RIAS Symphony Orchestra, as it was originally known in the Fricsay years. This produced a fine, albeit palpably Karajanesque, performance of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony, which still sounds well. The greater revelation, however, was Chailly's matchless 1986 account of Mahler's Tenth Symphony in the Deryck Cooke completion. As Michael Kennedy remarked at the time, Chailly accepted the work unapologetically as a fait accompli. What's more, he appeared to understand the thematic connections within and between movements better than anyone, even Rattle whose early Bournemouth recording (EMI, 12/80) currently held sway.

In 1984 Karajan invited Chailly to Salzburg, much as he had invited the young Abbado, Levine, Mehta, Muti

and Ozawa two decades earlier. Verdi's *Macbeth* was the opening assignment. Then in 1986 Karajan connived with Kurt Masur to introduce Chailly to the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, an ensemble – had the old fox anticipated this? – which Chailly would later lead with distinction. Certainly, their *Gramophone* Award-winning 2012-13 Brahms cycle is one of the highlights – perhaps the highlight – of this 'Symphony Edition'.

Shortly after conducting an ill-attended concert of contemporary Italian music with the Concertgebouw Orchestra in 1985, Chailly was offered the chief conductorship as of 1988. Many were dismayed that he accepted. Karajan backed him by inviting the Concertgebouw to Salzburg in 1988, its first invitation in 30 years. But he, and others in the profession, feared there might be trouble ahead, such was the recent history and musical DNA of this most idiosyncratic of great orchestras.

And so it proved, as Chailly himself ('five bloody years') later revealed. Meeting fire with fire, he introduced a barrage of hitherto unplayed 20th-century pieces, while trying to establish a viable working relationship in more traditional repertory. Decca, however, rather than waiting for the dust to settle, kept on recording.

Since Chailly had begun a Bruckner cycle in Berlin (rather well) with symphonies Nos 0, 1, 3 and 7, it made sense to complete the cycle. It proved to be a bumpy journey, undertaken in a less-settled atmosphere than had been the case with the more durable cycle which Bernard Haitink had recorded with the orchestra in 1963-72 under the supervision of the Philips producer Jaap van Ginneken (1913-72). Van Ginneken knew the orchestra as a father knows a child. As a result, there are no duff or poorly played movements in the Haitink cycle, as there occasionally are in the Chailly.

Several of the earliest Concertgebouw recordings – a 1986 account of the César Franck symphony, a 1987 Dvořák *New World* – emerge as irascible and out of sorts. A Schumann cycle begins plausibly with the *Spring Symphony* but tails off. Nor is the 1987-92 Brahms cycle any match for the later Leipzig cycle. The latter was recorded as Chailly approached his 60th year, the age at which the old operatic maestros – Toscanini and the like – famously began to tackle the mighty abstraction that is the classical symphony. In 1991 Chailly is foisted by the Brahms Third; in 2012 he is its master.

A significant early triumph was a superb account of Prokofiev's Third Symphony, a terrifying piece born amid the wreckage of Prokofiev's opera *The Fiery Angel*. 'Significant' because Chailly knew the opera and had already recorded the symphony with the (predictably fearless) German Youth Orchestra (DG, 8/84). The newer disc also included a stunning performance of Varèse's *Arcana*, which is retained here. But why not more of Chailly's Varèse? Had this been a carefully selected 'Orchestral Edition', it might have made a better anniversary offering. Happily, Chailly's viscerally exciting 1992 account of Messiaen's *Turangalîla-Symphonie*, with Jean-Yves Thibaudet, does qualify for inclusion.

Chailly and the orchestra eventually found common ground in Mahler. The Berlin Mahler Tenth had marked him down as an engaged and perceptive Mahlerian; and here he was leading an orchestra whose Mahler tradition went back through Mengelberg to Mahler himself.

The start was misjudged: a 1989 account of the Sixth Symphony with an opening movement as slow as Barbirolli's (EMI, 7/68) though without the stamp of Barbirolli upon it. Chailly has since recanted, freely admitting, as David Gutman reported when reviewing the 2012 Leipzig DVD remake (Accentus, 3/14), 'to dumping the Mengelberg tradition which obsessed him in Amsterdam'. But why? Some of the results (the Seventh, Fourth and Fifth symphonies recorded in the mid-1990s) may have made uncomfortable listening but, truth to tell, this is a Mahler cycle like no other on record.

There are several reasons for this. One is Chailly's unblinking exploitation of the orchestra's distinctive wind and brass, blended or unblended as the music determines. Another was his own visceral take on the music. No conductor, not even Bernstein, has been as willing to allow certain key developments to take on an



Riccardo Chailly recording with the Berlin RSO (now DSO Berlin) at the Grosser Sendesaal of Sender Freies in 1986

anarchic, almost Ivesian quality. A third factor, closely related, is the famously open acoustic of the empty Concertgebouw hall, always a happy hunting-ground for old-school Decca engineers and perfect for Chailly's Mahler sound-mix.

As the cycle evolved, so it grew in stature with a fine *Resurrection* Symphony, a glorious account of the Third, and a Ninth that, by any standards, is a great Mahler performance. But, then, we go back to that pioneering 1986 Berlin Mahler Tenth which clearly fed into Chailly's understanding of the Ninth. Happily, the set continues to be available separately.

In 2005 Chailly jumped ship to Leipzig, trading one tradition of playing the classic repertoire for another that was leaner, speedier, more finely honed. His Leipzig Beethoven cycle (A/11) is a tour de force orchestrally, though I still find it unduly dispassionate, with speeds that occasionally outpace the mind's capacity to absorb the music.

The Leipzig remake of the Schumann symphonies deploys a similarly dispassionate style, draining the music of much of the lyricism and warmth which, in his earliest years, Chailly found in the music. And there's another thing. 'Curious, restless, affably opinionated' as Alex Ross once described him, Chailly chose to re-record the symphonies using Gustav Mahler's 'improved' orchestrations. George Szell, in a famous cycle, also 'adjusted' the orchestration, but more or less imperceptibly, and with minimal publicity.

Another problem with the Schumann is the lack of useful documentation. The original release came with a richly informative 2500-word essay on Mahler's changes by David Matthews. Here there is nothing.

Nor does the set have any texts and translations, despite the fact that four Mahler symphonies, Beethoven's Ninth, Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang*, Liszt's *Faust Symphony*, Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* and all but one of the Zemlinsky pieces have text. The set does have a 120-page booklet but much of it is given over to large-type content details and no fewer than 25 much-of-a-muchness full-page photographs of Chailly himself. Space enough there for texts, had anyone cared to think. **G**

See interview with Riccardo Chailly on page 16



THE RECORDING

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Sidney Foster: Rediscovering a Master

Jed Distler welcomes a survey exploring the legacy of an overlooked American pianist

Sidney Foster (1917-77) may be the ultimate candidate for the title of 'greatest pianist you've never heard of'. He studied at the Curtis Institute with two redoubtable perfectionists, Isabelle Vengerova and David Saperton. His 1940 victory in the first Leventritt competition led to a New York Philharmonic debut and a busy concert-giving schedule. Serious health problems thwarted, yet never completely curtailed, his performing career, although much of his energies were focused on teaching, primarily as a tenured professor at Indiana University from 1952 until his death. Evidently Foster was averse to the recording process, and left behind only two commercial releases. Fortunately, numerous archival concert and broadcast recordings exist. Some items appeared in the International Piano Archives at Maryland's limited edition two-disc collection 'Ovation to Sidney Foster' in 1993. The Marston label now offers seven CDs worth of live Foster material recorded between 1941 and 1975, most of which is released for the first time.

No doubt that Foster's dazzling technique, perceptive musicianship and palpable communicative powers will be a revelation for piano mavens, not to mention his wide-ranging repertoire. In a pair of Bach/Liszt organ transcriptions, Foster projects the original scoring's sonorous grandeur without losing one iota of linear cogency. Mozart's G major Sonata, K283, is a model of stylish grace and equilibrium in Foster's hands, as is the 1941 New York Philharmonic broadcast of Beethoven's Third Concerto conducted by Barbirolli, where Foster provided his own tasteful and inventive first-movement cadenza. A fuller measure of Foster's Beethoven can be found in a 1971 *Waldstein* Sonata teeming with shapely impetus, as well as certain 'old school' traits such as the broad ritards at the first theme's end and taking the Rondo's unorthodox pedal indications with a grain of salt. The pianist's 1966 Op 110 features a gorgeously parsed *Adagio ma non troppo*, and notice his sovereign, unflappable control of the briskly paced fugue.

Early 19th-century Romantics account for some of the collection's most invigorating interpretations, such as the large-scaled excitement of the



If you haven't heard of Sidney Foster, now is the time to get acquainted

Mendelssohn F sharp minor Fantasia's finale, and the daringly protracted Trio section in Chopin's 'Funeral March' Sonata. Schumann's *Carnaval* teems with nervous energy, perhaps excessively so; I find that Foster projects the composer's Janus-like passion and repose more convincingly in *Papillons* and the A minor Piano Concerto's first two movements (the latter's finale is less poised).

Foster's dazzling technique, perceptive musicianship and palpable communicative powers will be a revelation

Brahms's F minor Sonata and Four Ballades Op 10 live vibrantly and a little too dangerously in Foster's ardent hands. By contrast, the pianist fully settles into the Franck *Prelude, Chorale and Fugue*'s comparably massive textures. Strong transitions and polyphonic awareness result in one of the most cohesive accounts I know of Chopin's F minor Fantasy, although the Fourth Ballade finds Foster all over the place in regard to dynamic scaling and dramatic contrast. It takes time for Foster to warm up at the Liszt Sonata's outset, but it's smooth and expressive sailing from the lyrical second theme

onward, while unusual accentuations and phrase groupings hold interest throughout the Tarantella from *Venezia e Napoli*.

If Foster overshoots the mark in Chopin's 'Black Key' and F major Op 10 Etudes, his stunningly controlled breakneck tempo for Op 10 No 4 gives Sviatoslav Richter's like-minded conception a run for its money. And you'll rarely hear Op 10 No 6 sung out like a heartfelt tone poem, or the Chopin B minor Sonata Scherzo's Trio move so freely over the bar lines. Foster's Rachmaninov and Scriabin may not match Horowitz's scintillation and necromantic hues, yet he brilliantly fuses bravura and poetry throughout Tchaikovsky's First Concerto, where the uncommonly fast but flexibly paced central *Andantino semplice* complements a lithe and balletic approach to the *Prestissimo* section.

Foster is both inside and on top of Prokofiev's idiom in the Ninth Sonata and a selection of *Visions Fugitives*, and he brings out all of the rhythmic vivacity and melodic joy in the faster movements of Norman Dello Joio's wonderful Third Sonata. A live 1965 Bartók Third Concerto with Aaron Copland leading the Boston Symphony boasts particular musical and historic significance, standing out for the animated conversational quality of the second movement's piano/clarinet dialogue and the sharply delineated fugato in the finale. Among Foster's celebrated encores, his rip-roaring Weber *Perpetuum Mobile* deserves attention, although this 1954 reading seems a tad helter-skelter compared to the amazing (and better engineered) 1959 performance issued on the aforementioned IPAM set. The pianist Alberto Reyes, a former Foster pupil, provides informative annotations that include touching personal remembrances of his mentor. The sound quality of these archival recordings varies from work to work, yet everything is listenable. An important and highly recommended release. **G**

THE RECORDING

'Sidney Foster: Rediscovering an American Master'

Marston M 57001-2

Available from marstonrecords.com for \$72, plus p&p

Rhine gold: an archive treasure trove

Rob Cowan welcomes a historic label that has unearthed some remarkable treasures

A Brahms Double Concerto with Jascha Heifetz, Gregor Piatigorsky and Leonard Bernstein conducting the New York Philharmonic? Having seen the promotional flyer I rubbed my eyes and, no, I wasn't dreaming. Imagine my delight when the recently launched historic label Rhine Classics sent me the evidence, a 1963 performance that for colour, drive and spontaneous impulse quite upstages the famous 1960 RCA Heifetz/Piatigorsky/Alfred Wallenstein Double, though Bernstein's presence was no doubt a significant factor. The finale closes in a blaze of excitement; the applause is ecstatic, and when Heifetz announces the encore, Halvorsen's Passacaglia, he responds to the correction (from somewhere beyond the stage) that it's actually Handel-Halvorsen. That too is stunning. The second CD of this bolt-out-of-blue two-disc set is devoted to an account of the Beethoven Concerto from the

following year, in excellent stereo this time, again with the NYPO but under Zubin Mehta. True, Heifetz is set fairly far back on the sound stage, but not enough to mask his crystalline playing, signature sweetness of tone and abundant energy. He weaves in and out of the orchestra like some exquisitely coloured humming bird and Mehta's band is with him every inch of the way. The fill-ups, both from 1950 and with a studio orchestra, are Dvořák's *Humoresque* and, most remarkable, Sarasate's 'Habañera', classic virtuoso Heifetz with its forceful accents and lightning finale.

Heifetz's stylistic consistency contrasts with the marked vicissitudes of 'attitude' in the playing of that charismatic maverick **Ivry Gitlis**, the subject of another treasurable double-CD set where two versions of the Bartók Solo Sonata (from 1951 and 1963 respectively) are about as unalike as you could imagine (try the two readings of the 'Melodia'). Chausson's *Poème* is memorably passionate though there's some tape rumble and Gitlis shifts in and out of focus. But the sheer variety



Aldo Ferraresi: revelatory in the violin concertos by Elgar and Walton

of playing on offer, whether in miniatures or larger pieces (such as Bach's Chaconne and Brahms's Third Sonata) conveys a rare level of dedication, with never a dull note to compromise one's pleasure.

Ferraresi has a pleasingly seductive sound, its expressive manner an approximate cross between Merckel and Enescu

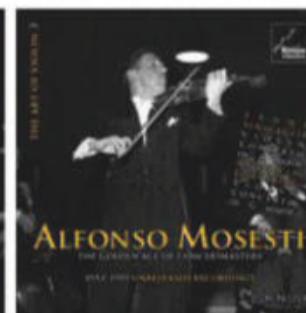
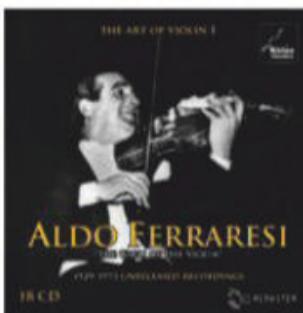
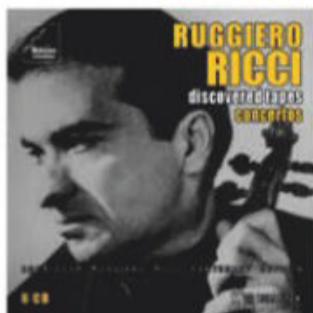
The shimmering playing style of **Ruggiero Ricci** is very generously represented, with three centenary sets (he was born in 1918), the first devoted to concertos and including the world premiere of Ginastera's Concerto of 1963, dedicated jointly to Ricci and Bernstein, a gritty, outspoken piece fearlessly performed. Two accounts of Paganini's First Concerto (1958 under Thomas Schippers and 1975 under Heribert Esser) feature the cripplingly difficult second version of Sauret's first-movement cadenza

(1912), which Ricci throws off with athletic aplomb. Other works number Veerhoff's First Concerto (composed 1976, and performed under Cristóbal Halffter) and Émile Jaques-Dalcroze's First (composed 1901, Ricci here plays under Ernest Ansermet's direction) among their ranks, as well as Paganini's Fourth and Sixth Concertos, two excellent versions of the Brahms Concerto (Henri Pensis and Eugen Jochum), and concertos by Goldmark, Glazunov, Dvořák and Stravinsky (not quite so good) plus an extremely flexible Sibelius Concerto under Hans Swarowsky. The other two Ricci sets are devoted respectively to sonatas (RH013, four CDs, with one of the most gripping accounts of Bloch's First Sonata ever recorded) and 'showpieces' (also four CDs: RH012) with a short sequence of Paganini *Caprices* recorded in New York in 1946 that for brilliance quite defies belief.

So much for the big names.

But the really big news here is the violinist **Aldo Ferraresi** (1902-78), much admired by Ysaÿe and who in 1950, in Genoa for the 500th anniversary of the birth of Christopher Columbus, performed Paganini's First Violin Concerto on the composer's own 1743 Guarnieri 'Il Cannone'. Ferraresi has a pleasingly seductive sound, its expressive manner an approximate cross between Henri Merckel and Georges Enescu, sweet-centred (the odd spot of portamento compounds the effect) yet taut and with plenty of tension in faster music: in other words a virtuoso with the soul of a poet. Some recordings were issued in the 1960s by Fratelli Fabbri Editori, multimedia packages featuring LP discs that were 20cms in diameter, an undoubted highlight – also included here – being Paganini's First Concerto where Ferraresi's keen attack and hot, vibrant tone recall the impetuous pre-war HMV version by Yehudi Menuhin under Pierre Monteux. Franco Gallini conducts, as he does for Ferraresi's equally remarkable account of the Fourth Concerto.

One might justifiably expect this red-blooded Italian to excel in Paganini, but



what about Elgar? This is the real revelation of the collection, a recording of the Violin Concerto under Pietro Argento from March 1966, which is possibly the most Albert Sammons-like performance I've heard since Sammons's own electrical recording under Henry Wood. Here, as there, the tempos are generally fast, Ferraresi's vibrato too, and there's a symbiotic bonding between the highly emotive score and its interpreter, most especially in the slow movement. Walton comes off almost equally well. There are two versions of his Concerto included, the earliest from 1955 with the Royal Philharmonic under the composer's direction, a very fine performance though the balance keeps Ferraresi farther away than is ideal which makes the better recorded 1961 Milan alternative under Milton Forstater mandatory.

Masterpieces from later in the last century include Shostakovich's First Concerto (Mario Rossi conducts), where the playing at times has an almost *bel canto* quality to it; the Khachaturian Concerto, crisp and sensual under the composer's direction, and Arthur Benjamin's *Romantic Fantasy* for violin and viola (with the fine viola-player Hermann Friedrich), not to mention concertos by Tchaikovsky, Mozart (No 5, under Carlo Zecchi) and Beethoven, the latter performance notable for its purity and restraint. As for repertory rarities, Bazzini's Fourth Concerto is a find, as is D'Ambrosio's First Concerto, and there are works by Stjepan Sulek and Mario Guarino (both are dedicated to Ferraresi), Carlo Jachino, Salvatore Allegra, Franco Mannino, Franco Alfano and Karl Höller. Various sonatas are also included, as well as Brahms's Piano Quintet with pianist Marco Martini and Ferraresi's Quartetto di San Remo (good though not exceptional); there are spoken reminiscences (in Italian) and supplementary early recordings of shorter 'genre' pieces. Any connoisseur of the instrument simply has to hear Aldo Ferraresi and I cannot recommend this set highly enough. All told the sound quality is generally more than acceptable.

Back in March 2017 I welcomed a CD on Melo Classic devoted to the art of the Milanese violinist **Wanda Luzzato**, whose

playing most reminded me, 'in its intellectual rigour and seductive warmth', of Adolf Busch. From Rhine Classics we now have an eight-CD Luzzato celebration, a trawl of unreleased recordings from 1955 to '79. Quite apart from extending our experience of this gifted artist with a widened range of repertoire, including a Ghedini Divertimento written especially for her, we are granted the unique opportunity of hearing her at home unaccompanied rehearsing the solo parts of concertos, Mozart's D major and Mendelssohn's E minor in this instance stretching our imaginations to conjure the orchestral parts while listening to Luzzato's persuasive playing in a unique context. Magical is the word.

Then there's **Alfonso Mosesti**, the gifted Concertmaster of RAI orchestras in Rome, Naples and Turin, a fine soloist too, who does an excellent job with the A major Violin Concerto by the Italian-Jewish composer Leone Sinigaglia (the first movement's second subject is especially lovely), which is coupled with a work he premiered, Antonio Illersberg's Concerto in G. Mosesti is another violinist who reminds me of Busch.

Piano-wise Rhine Classics has given us a stimulating six-CD set of **Pietro Scarpini** playing Busoni and Liszt. Two of these recordings – Liszt's *Malédiction* (under Claudio Abbado) and Busoni's *Indian Fantasy* (under Piero Bellugi) – are in very respectable stereo, while the performances are mightily impressive. Scarpini's 1964 Busoni is the best I've heard since Egon Petri and in the formidable 36-minute *Fantasia contrappuntistica* for two pianos (fourth version) the first and second piano parts are overdubbed by Scarpini himself, not that you'd guess, such is the unanimity of the playing. The same method is employed for another two-piano work, namely the Improvisations on Bach's choral song *Wie wohl ist mir*. Scarpini's imposing 1966 interpretation of Busoni's Piano Concerto under Rafael Kubelík, has already appeared on First Hand Records. My initial reaction to this splendid performance, which is served up in very respectable stereo sound, homed in on these artists' shared vision 'where each abandons, or seems to abandon, his specific role and opts instead for the overall role of musician pure

and simple, Scarpini's piano serving as a second, integrated orchestra, Kubelík and his Bavarian players often achieving soloistic levels of subtlety' (as I wrote in last year's Awards issue). Numerous shorter works by both Busoni and Liszt are included, all played with intelligence and the odd tell-tale flashback to old-world performing gestures. A double-pack of Scarpini playing Mozart (RH014) includes Concertos Nos 25 (under Artur Rodzinski) and 27 (under Vittorio Gui), playing that in its finely crafted classicism reminded me of Robert Casadesus. The second CD is devoted to solo works, including the Sonatas K332 and K457.

And lastly **Sergio Fiorentino** 'Live in Taiwan' on May 29, 1998, grandeur personified, especially in the opening Bach Prelude and Fugue BWV532 (arr 'Busoni-Fiorentino') while Fiorentino conveys the depth and mystery of Beethoven's Sonata No 31 and raises a storm with the Second Sonatas of Scriabin and Rachmaninov. So here's to the next Rhine Classics releases, including more Fiorentino and a big box of recordings by the violinist Franco Gulli, recently featured in music by Albert Curci on First Hand Records. I'll be filling you in as soon as they arrive.

THE RECORDINGS

Jascha Heifetz Live and unreleased recordings 1950-64

Rhine Classics M ② RH004

Ivry Gitlis The early years, birth of a legend

Rhine Classics M ② RH011

Ruggiero Ricci Centenary edition: discovered tapes – concertos

Rhine Classics M ⑥ RH008

Aldo Ferraresi 'The Gigli of the Violin', recordings 1929-73

Rhine Classics M ⑯ RH001

Wanda Luzzato Unreleased recordings 1955-79

Rhine Classics M ⑧ RH002

Alfonso Mosesti The Golden Age of Concertmasters

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BOX-SET Round-up

Rob Cowan offers a personal round-up of some worthwhile CD bargains

There have been many admirable collections of Bach's organ music issued on CD over the years but Brilliant Classics' recent survey principally by the Italian organist, musicologist, harpsichordist, conductor and music pedagogue Stefano Molardi adds considerable value to its enterprise by covering the wider **Bach family**, which means that in addition to the whole run of organ music by Johann Sebastian (though not including *The Art of Fugue*, which isn't strictly speaking an organ work), we hear stylistically varied compositions by Johann Christoph, Johann Michael, Johann Bernhard, Johann Friedrich, Johann Lorenz, Wilhelm Friedemann, Carl Philipp Emanuel, Johann Ernst and 'attribution uncertain'. Quite aside from the worthwhile repertory diversions, Molardi's playing – as realised on instruments at various locations by Zacharias Hilderbrandt, Gottfried Silbermann, Tobias Heinrich Gottfried Trost, Johann Christoph Thilemann, F Volckland and the Dell'Orto e Lanzini organ – has a sense of inevitability about it that reminded me of Helmut Walcha, while the mostly close-set recordings transform your speakers into an organ. Wilhelm Friedemann's works are entrusted to Filippo Turri at a Francesco Zanin organ while the music of CPE Bach finds Luca Scandali at the Dell'Orto e Lanzini organ. If you want to sample what a Bach from a camp nearby to JSB sounds like, try WF Bach's Four Fugues, where Turri's playing resembles Molardi's in its unerring sense of rightness.

A quite different manner of **Bach** performance arrives from pianist Rosalyn Tureck, whose early 1950s American Decca (UK Brunswick) recording of Bach's *Well-tempered Clavier* was for years a sought-after collector's item, fetching mega-bucks on the second-hand market, where it was seen only very rarely. When DG recorded Tureck late in life playing the *Goldberg Variations*, being owners of the Decca catalogue, it was able to reissue the '48' on CD (it has since reissued both recordings together) and now The Intense Media/Documents has included the '48' in its own collection of 'Milestones of a Piano Legend'. Tureck was an influence on Glenn Gould, her Bach-playing prophetically crisp, rhythmically impeccable



and, in terms of counterpoint, multi-dimensional ... but it also veered towards some very broad tempos. Before listening you need to adjust your sensibilities, more so than with Gould who, although similarly broad in the opening *Goldberg's Aria* (in his 1981 recording), was more sparing with repeats and far swifter in the faster variations. Tureck's Bach is more a visitation, being contemplative and

No performance from Café Zimmermann is ever boring or indifferent, and I had a whale of a time listening

analytical, and where material is repeated it's usually played much as it was the first time around. These performances get me every time, but 'every time' needs to be chosen with discretion. Also included are roughly contemporaneous recordings of the *Italian Concerto*, the *Overture in the French Style*, the Toccata, Adagio and Fugue (in D, better known as simply 'Toccata' and not to be confused with the organ work in C), the Capriccio 'on the departure of his beloved brother' (where Tureck captures the music's narrative aspect to perfection) and Partitas Nos 2, 3 and 5. The sound is variable but never less than acceptable.

More **Bach**, different yet again in the manner of its interpretation, arrives courtesy of the period instrument ensemble Café Zimmermann, their Alpha Classics legacy, which includes concertos of sundry kinds, including the complete *Brandenburg Concertos* and orchestral suites, solo and

multiple keyboard concertos and various works involving other instruments. In addition we're given harpsichordist Céline Frisch's beautifully judged account of the *Goldberg Variations*, canons, German songs, Cantatas Nos 30a and 207, sinfonias and other works by CPE Bach and music by Corrette, Marais, Avison, d'Anglebert and Lully. The manner of performance is vital occasionally to the point of aggression, with fiercely projected rhythms offset by warmly performed slow movements. What's for sure is that no performance is ever boring or indifferent and the sound has immense immediacy. I had a whale of a time listening.

Elements of the *concerto grosso* are writ large in **Bohuslav Martinu's** complete works involving violin and orchestra, which Bohuslav Matoušek recorded for Hyperion with the Czech Philharmonic under Christopher Hogwood. Happily the four original Hyperion CDs have now been housed together in a single box. The overwhelming impression throughout the set is of neoclassical busyness, the opening of the First Violin Concerto recalling Stravinsky, though the darkly introspective Second Concerto is very different. Aleš Březina's excellent booklet note relates the concerto's oddball birth pangs involving its commissioning violinist Mischa Elman, who apparently performed it often. Another beautiful piece is the *Rhapsody-Concerto* for viola and orchestra, where Matoušek proves himself equally accomplished with the larger instrument. There are 11 works in all, with Martinu's distinctive stylistic fingerprints recognisable in all of them. The performances and recordings are first-rate. 6

THE RECORDINGS

Bach family Complete Organ Music

Stefano Molardi et al

Brilliant Classics ⑧ (24 discs) 95803

Bach Rosalyn Tureck

Documents ⑧ 600474

JS Bach. CPE Bach. Vivaldi. Avison et al

Café Zimmermann

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Martinu Complete Music for Violin

and Orchestra

Bohuslav Matoušek; Czech PO /

Christopher Hogwood

Hyperion ⑧ CDS44611/4

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings



Stokowski in the familiar and in the new

Were I to ask you to identify Artur Rodziński's premiere recording, would you hazard a guess as to what it is? I certainly wouldn't have guessed that his 1927 recording debut was as a pianist for a whistle-stop tour through Dvořák's *New World* Symphony by Leopold Stokowski, with sundry spoken references that nowadays would be deemed politically incorrect. Mention of various national characteristics fight shy of anything vaguely Czech, and key musical points of interest are glossed over, but still, it was a pretty bold undertaking for the period, all four minutes of it.

The actual performance of the symphony featuring the Philadelphia Orchestra (the conductor's second version in front of an RCA Victor microphone) is charged with temperament, the opening minutes volatile in the extreme, the *Largo* warmly expressed, the *Scherzo* fiery and the finale unusual in two respects: Stokowski's usefully deliberate approach to the development section (from bar 154, at 5'24"); and the observance of the *con fuoco* marking at bar 331 (10'06", having added a cymbal clash immediately beforehand), an option later taken by Willem Mengelberg and Sir Colin Davis.

Leopold Stokowski was a dab hand when it came to premiering new music

The coupling is an equally affecting account of Brahms's Third Symphony from the following year, though don't be put off by the way that Stokowski suddenly slams on the brakes after a bracing, swiftly paced first subject. The tempo soon picks up again and there's some glorious playing in the first movement's centre, as well as in the middle two movements. Mark Obert-Thorn has drawn an excellent bed of sound from the generally fine recording, capturing the horns and bassoons at the close of the second movement. Both performances feature prominent portamentos on the strings and a very flexible approach to tempo relations, but whether or not you agree with the

interpretative options taken, their colouristic and dramatic effects are never in doubt.

Like his fellow mavericks of the rostrum, Mengelberg and Sir Thomas Beecham, Stokowski was a dab hand when it came to premiering new music. Pristine's superbly transferred double-pack of 'Wartime NBC Premières' is nothing short of miraculous in its high level of confidence and virtuosity. German composer Richard Mohaupt penned his *Concerto for Orchestra Based on Red Army Songs*, 'the composer's own heartfelt tribute to the valour of the Russian Army', in 1942, and the 1943 world premiere calls on the conductor's celebrated sympathy for Russian music, the playing, especially from the NBC strings, intensely expressive. Much the same applied to highly emotive works by Howard Hanson (Fourth Symphony – *The Requiem*, 1943) and Daniele Amfitheatrof (*De profundis clamavi*, 1944). Hanson's work was written 'in memory of my beloved Father', and years later the composer congratulated the maestro (by then 90 years old) on this 'magnificent performance'. The piece's highlight is surely the finale, 'Lux aeterna', which reaches Tchaikovskian levels of intensity, especially in a performance that burns as brightly as this one does. Amfitheatrof's piece, a real emotional roller coaster, is a tribute to those who were then losing their lives across the seas. It lasts for some 20 minutes – but I'd suggest not playing it if you're feeling 'down'. I can't imagine this performance ever being bettered, for its passion, sense of welling drama and utter dedication.

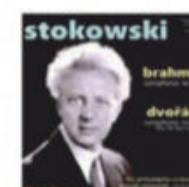
George Antheil's Fourth Symphony (1942), written in 1942, reflects harrowing news from various wartime locations in music that at times seems to mirror Prokofiev, at other times perhaps Mosolov or even Shostakovich. This 'bad boy of music' (as he was popularly daubed) was actually a rather good boy, certainly in comparison with some of his peers, and while this consistently mobile work keeps the decibels high for virtually the whole of its duration, it's not exactly avant-garde music, not as we understand the term

nowadays. The performance is immensely vital, as is the premiere of Paul Lavalle's forgettable *Symphonic Rhumba*, which works itself into a rhythmically crazed 'tizz' for no apparent musical reason.

Schoenberg's Piano Concerto, on the other hand, in its nobility and rugged grandeur, approximates the music of Brahms (maybe Piano Concerto No 2). In a brief pre-performance introduction, Stokowski pledges his faith in the piece, suggesting that although it might be difficult to grasp on first hearing, it's a landmark composition. And true enough, while the opening 39 bars present all four modes of the note row, even the uninitiated might soon adjust to its highly condensed but unapologetically direct musical language. As with so much in this collection, the musicians, in this case pianist Eduard Steuermann, the NBC players and Stokowski, seem already to have the music as part of their DNA.

The US premiere of Copland's *Short Symphony* (Symphony No 2, 1932-33) – which opens the set – is the one item that seems to misfire as a performance; this is right from the start, where the orchestra sounds all at sea. In his excellent (albeit brief) note, Stokowski expert Edward Johnson quotes Copland's own description of the piece, 'complex rhythms, combined with clear textures', and so on. 'A good try' is, I suppose, the fairest appraisal, but turn to Michael Tilson Thomas (RCA) or the composer himself (Sony Classical) and you're on safer ground. This work needed time to settle, and that time hadn't yet arrived on January 9, 1944. Otherwise, this is an utterly magnificent release.

THE RECORDINGS



Brahms, Dvořák

Symphonies

Philadelphia Orchestra / Stokowski

Pristine Audio (F) PASC540



'Stokowski: Wartime NBC Premières': Copland, Antheil, Schoenberg et al

Steuermann pf NBC SO

Pristine Audio (F) ② PASC536



Stokowski (1882-1977) was as adept in the classic orchestral repertoire as he was in premiering new music

Milstein in Dvořák and Mendelssohn

A while ago Pristine issued a 1947 recording of Dvořák's Violin Concerto featuring Nathan Milstein with the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra under Stokowski (PASC503), a 'first' in Stokowski's discography just as Audite's release of a 1955 recording with Milstein and the Swiss Festival Orchestra under Ernest Ansermet marks a 'first' in the discography of Ansermet. Both are fine, though the Stokowski-led *Adagio ma non troppo* is perhaps marginally more intimate than its Swiss successor. On the other hand, Ansermet's handling of the orchestral score is marginally more flexible than Stokowski's, and the sound is, of course, far superior. Pristine's couplings are a vigorous Milstein performance of Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* in its four-movement incarnation with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy and music from Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto with the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra under Arturo Toscanini (part of the slow movement and the whole of the finale). Milstein and Igor Markevitch (again with the Swiss Festival Orchestra, 1953 this time) aren't quite so eloquent in the slow music of the Mendelssohn, but the performance is extremely fine, Markevitch's conducting, like Ansermet's in the Dvořák, admirably flexible. The sound is acceptable throughout, save for some distant tape rumble in the Mendelssohn.

PHOTOGRAPH: BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

THE RECORDING

Dvořák, Mendelssohn
Violin concertos
Milstein vn Swiss Fest Orch / Ansermet, Markevitch
Audite (F) AUDITE95 646

Bodanzky beyond Wagner

Artur Bodanzky was Mahler's conducting assistant, a Zemlinsky composition pupil, accepted by Toscanini at New York's Met in German repertoire as recommended by Busoni ... Some CV! Collectors and 1930s American opera-goers associate him mostly with Wagner. His thrilling, albeit textually abridged, broadcasts of the *Ring* and other music dramas are the stuff of dreams and generally don't sound too bad either. This CD opens with his only commercial discs of Wagner: four orchestral pieces – the *Tannhäuser* and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* overtures and the two *Lohengrin* preludes (to acts 1 and 3) – very well played by the Berlin State Opera Orchestra. *Lohengrin*'s third-act prelude goes at a real lick and morphs into the beginning of the Bridal March; while the entrance of the Prize Song motif in the strings is a magical moment in the *Meistersinger* recording. But Wagner isn't the main reason for acquiring this CD, as there are also various other overtures and a stirring account of Berlioz's Hungarian March (from *La damnation de Faust*) that ends with a dramatic crescendo-diminuendo. Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* Overture opens forcefully and includes busy reportage of the main body of the piece, and in Thomas's *Mignon* Overture there's exceptional solo wind playing and

the Berlin strings are feather-light at speed, the phrasing of the more lyrical music being worthy of comparison with Beecham in similar music. Offenbach's *Orphée aux enfers* Overture includes a beautiful violin solo and a witty preparation for the cancan finale, which is extremely brilliant. In Suppé's *Ein Morgen, Mittag und Abend in Wien* Overture you hear the clarinet above the cello in the first main melody, and the Overture to *Die Fledermaus* never camps up the lilting element. The recordings are in general well balanced, and Mark Obert-Thorn's transfers maintain a high standard throughout.

THE RECORDING

Wagner, Mozart, Suppé et al
Berlin State Opera Orchestra / Bodanzky
Pristine Audio (F) PASC537

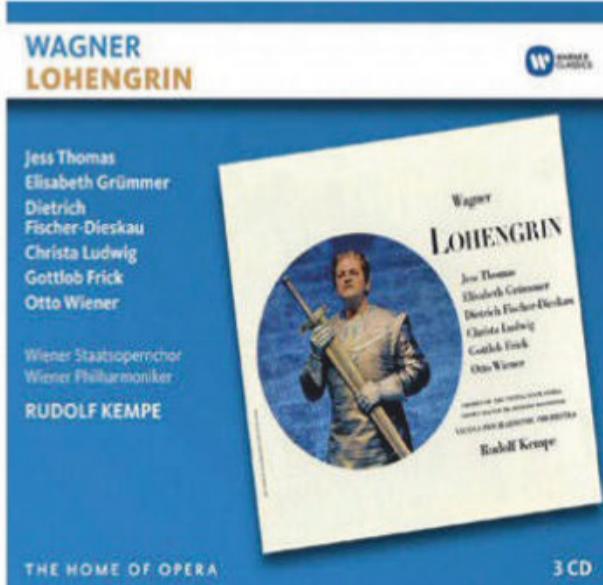
Celibidache's Ravel

In *Gramophone* last month I reported that Sergiu Celibidache's Munich Philharmonic legacy for Warner Classics has resurfaced as a reasonably priced box-set, but the trawl of his recordings with that orchestra doesn't end there. MPHIL (in association with BR-Klassik) has also unearthed some valuable broadcasts, most recently a Ravel programme. This replicates repertoire he recorded with the SWR Stuttgart RSO (DG 453 1972), including the *Daphnis et Chloé* Suite No 2. Here we're also given Suite No 1 – music-making that shimmers from the outset, the choral Interlude controlled with rapt intensity, the closing 'Danse guerrière' ferocious without rushing its fences. Suite No 2 is just as remarkable, most of all in the 'Pantomime' (7'34" in Munich as opposed to 6'16" in Stuttgart): witness the strings' cajoling response to the woodwind at the start of the movement. As with the First Suite, the Second ends in a storm of organised excitement, with towering climaxes and carefully tiered dynamics. *La valse* combines seduction and a sense of catastrophe in both recordings; and as for *Le tombeau de Couperin*, perhaps the most controversial interpretation here is of the Forlane, where Celibidache takes the music at a very leisurely pace, though the woodwind lines in particular benefit. The sound quality throughout is clear and full in texture.

THE RECORDING

Ravel
Munich PO / Celibidache
MPHIL (F) MPHIL0010

Classics RECONSIDERED



Wagner

Lohengrin

Jess Thomas ten **Elisabeth Grümmer** sop
Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau bar **Christa Ludwig**
mez **Gottlob Frick, Otto Wiener** basses
Vienna State Opera Chorus;
Vienna Philharmonic / Rudolf Kempe

Warner Classics (formerly EMI)

Jess Thomas's attractive singing suggests a manly, youthful knight, authoritative in his warning to Elsa not to ask his name or origin, scornful in his treatment of Ortrud and Telramund, tender in the long love duet, until Elsa presses him to reveal



himself, and fine in the dramatic end of the Narration. What he does not suggest, as the orchestra so insistently does, is the mystery that surrounds him and his origin. If he can add mystery to his Lohengrin, he would excel all others.

Elisabeth Grümmer, in her first recording of her part, gives a touching, lovely, and, where needed, dramatic reading of her part. Astrid Varnay was a very dramatic Ortrud in the Bayreuth recording, but she is surpassed by the vocally more secure Christa Ludwig, who hurls herself into the malevolent role. Fischer-Dieskau's superb

Mike Ashman and **Andrew Mellor** listen again to Rudolf Kempe's 1962-63 EMI recording of Wagner's *Lohengrin* with the Vienna Philharmonic and a starry roster of soloists



Telramund is a weak, ambitious, bitterly disappointed man, who sincerely believes Elsa has murdered her brother, the rightful heir to the throne of Brabant. The *tessitura* of the part, with its constant use of the top of the stave, must be trying, but Fischer-Dieskau does not tire and, like Ludwig, he brings a wealth of nuance to his singing.

The playing of the VPO in all departments under Kempe is absolutely glorious all through. He establishes at once the right tempos and moods and gets exquisite playing in the many lyrical passages. **Alec Robertson (2/64)**

Mike Ashman Rudolf Kempe – never a recording star, or even a regular presence in the studios – might have been considered a left-field choice to lead a major Wagner recording in the early 1960s. But not only had he been in charge of successful *Ring* cycles at Covent Garden in the 1950s, but also he was at the time Bayreuth's chosen *Ring* conductor and had already recorded *Lohengrin*, in Munich in 1951. His passionate yet unforced and lyrical approach to the score instantly seemed a perfect fit. Do you agree?

Andrew Mellor I do. Technically there is hardly anything to pull Kempe up on, but I do feel that some aspects of his performance work better than others. You mention him working on the *Ring* before this – and wasn't the Vienna Philharmonic midway through the Solti *Ring* in 1963? It's easy to sound caught between worlds in *Lohengrin*, and that's occasionally the rub here. I sense Kempe trying to nail the mysticism with the way he has the fanfares played and recorded and so on, while the same sort of ritualistic, proto-*Parsifal* styling falls flat elsewhere. His difficulty

in harnessing the sense of excitement that should sweep across the stage, from characters to chorus, at Lohengrin's arrival is the most obvious example in my mind. Am I unjustifiably imposing latter-day values on to Kempe's vision?

MA No! You're absolutely right – going back to it, I feel guilty of being asleep on watch all these years. It lacks that Mendelssohnian 'all's going to be right with the world' joy that, say, Andris Nelsons – who seems to be the current *Lohengrin* king – brings to it so clearly. Tell me more. Are there other places where you feel Kempe misses out?

AM Not too many, but if we stick to that same problem while taking it in the other direction, there's Elsa's appearance in the bridal procession in Act 2. Kempe gets radiance from the instruments, but again the chorus seems unable to muster any sense of that stilled rapture. Perhaps it's the recording at play, but for me the brittleness of the chorus too often deflates the fairy-tale magic that can be so devastatingly moving. But then, the confrontation between Ortrud and Elsa that rips into that

procession is thrilling isn't it? What's your take on the casting here – it's more complex than innocent, silvery Elsa versus evil, throaty Ortrud, right?

MA I'm glad we're on to the recording itself, which has struck me always as being the weakest part of this whole enterprise. Of course, it was always a shock alongside Decca's contemporaneous *Ring* and other big German pieces: Decca did *everything* from acoustic altering to a constant chain of special effects, EMI did *nothing*. And I think it is crucial in assessing that lack of magic and atmosphere, which I agree mars the chorus-work (try their supposedly 'shocked' reactions in Act 2 to what Ortrud and, later, Telramund are saying here).

And yes, to answer your second point, both these ladies as cast are taking it some way beyond a Dorothy and the Wicked Witch level – which I think has much to do with Kempe, who (as in his *Ring* recordings) always worked against crude melodrama.

AM As you mention Decca, there is so much magic and mysticism in the Solti recording from the 1980s where the Vienna State



Rudolf Kempe pictured in the early 1960s

Opera Chorus sounds like an entirely different ensemble. But back to Kempe ... Does the rather arid EMI sound actually help when it comes to Ortrud's first big accusation of Elsa?

MA I would say that the sheer bareness of the acoustic doesn't help Ludwig at all, but rather emphasises how high the part is for her. (Today's Brünnhildes and Elektras, like Evelyn Herlitzius, sound more comfortable in the part, and have the vocal room to make more points.)

AM Going back to your comment about Kempe's working against crude melodrama in the characterisation of Elsa and Ortrud: it is one of the most interesting elements of the recording and the one that challenges me most as a lover of the work. To some extent Grümmer blows out of the water this idea of Elsa as a vulnerable, lonesome dreamer – a Senta-like character. She sounds defiant, almost railing at the massed opposition in Act 1 (compare it with the wide-eyed innocence and almost supernatural hope of Anja Harteros on the Munich DVD you picked as a choice in your

PHOTOGRAPH: SIEGFRIED LAUTERWASSER/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

July 2010 Collection); and she's still more mature in Act 3, which might be down to the way that Kempe appears steadily to draw more and more from her. Then we have this Ortrud with added nobility, and Ludwig is so good with the text she almost makes it *her* story. I'm basically an old softie who melts at the idea of a bloke arriving on a swan to save a vulnerable girl. What's your take on that from a dramaturgical point of view?

MA Split down the middle! My romantic side agrees with your 'softie' view; my dramaturgical side likes a more feminist approach in which Elsa is more than a doormat for Lohengrin's problematic (and quite chauvinistic) secrecy, and Ortrud makes a more subtle case for herself. (Incidentally, in later accessible performances, Ludwig actually presents an even blacker, Lady Macbeth-style villainess while Kempe goes on building up Elsa.) But we should get on to Fischer-Dieskau's Telramund, an even more controversial assumption of a role, perhaps – verbally acute as ever, but lacking the rounded, more bassy sound the role seems to demand as Lohengrin's main opponent.

AM It's the tone of the voice that makes it so unvillainous, but he could surely have got around it by singing in a less (for want of a better word) 'fatherly' manner. I think it's connected to actual vocal tone – that hint of mahogany – more than to tessitura. Your use of the word 'rounded' is a good way of putting it. Those little touches of anger, as in 'betrügst du jetzt mich noch' quite early on, feel contrived to me. Telramund's desperation comes across rather better at the end of Act 2, but to my ears the gradations aren't there – the dramatic flexibility and the journey to that point. I am sure you will have some thoughts on that, but in the same breath, where do you stand on Alec Robertson's accusation that as Lohengrin Jess Thomas scores higher on musicianship than on characterisation?

MA I guess Fischer-Dieskau is trying to play Telramund as a much-misled tragic hero, a kind of idealistic Macbeth. Thomas? No, I don't agree with that; I've come to like him more and more over the years and I find what some call a lack of characterisation actually to be the character – strong, unyielding, unsentimental. And frankly it's a relief after some of the more crooning vocalism we've heard in this role more recently.

AM No crooning here! This brings us full circle, to the ritualistic/mysterious elements of the drama and the idea that Lohengrin appears from another time and place – and a sacred one at that. I agree fully on 'strong, unyielding, unsentimental', but when the music itself edges the character out of the ritualistic and into the dramatic, I hear a throaty strain in Thomas's voice (and an occasional tendency to sink flat) both in his general frustrations in Act 3 and also in 'In fernem Land'. Maybe that's just fine, given the state he's in. There's an argument that it's in the resolution of the work where Kempe's styling all comes together to make this a 'classic'. What's your reckoning?

MA We're not obliged here, of course, to come up with an overall recorded *Lohengrin* winner and I still feel this Kempe holds its own as a contributor to the catalogue as a sensible, and sensitive, middle-of-the-road option for its mostly strong cast and stylish musical direction. But I do now find the reservations highlighted here – the lack of magic from the chorus, the recorded quality, Fischer-Dieskau, Kempe's occasional lack of moving forwards – to be more serious than I once thought. Perhaps it's time for a new classic! **G**

Books



Gavin Plumley sifts through a weighty guide to orchestral music:

'There is a sense of a life's work about this compendium, effectively presenting all Philip's programme notes in one volume'

The Classical Music Lover's Companion to Orchestral Music

By Robert Philip

Yale University Press, HB, 968pp, £35

ISBN 978-0-300-12069-1



A century ago, Gustav Kobbé provided lovers of the lyric stage with a bible. And if initial editions of his 1919 *Complete Opera Book* were rather limited in scope, the Earl of Harewood and Antony Peattie's subsequent revisions embraced as wide a list of works as its readers could ever have hoped to have witnessed on stage. The orchestral repertoire has, until now, lacked a comparative gazetteer. Enter Robert Philip and his new 1000-page tome for Yale University Press: *The Classical Music Lover's Companion to Orchestral Music*. An ambitious project, elegantly published, it charts around 400 works by 67 composers from what Philip unapologetically calls the 'core repertoire' – that's from 1700 to around 1950, just in case you were wondering.

The timespan of the book's creation may not be quite so long, though Philip's career, as BBC scriptwriter and presenter, Open University lecturer and author, stretches back to the early 1970s. Indeed, there is a sense of a life's work about this compendium, effectively presenting all his programme notes in one volume, albeit expanded to the point of utility. And yet, despite the volume's practical intention of providing introductions to a large, general repertoire, it throws up more questions than it could hope to answer.

Who, after all, is that 'classical music lover'? The book's title suggests a presumption of knowledge, but, mindful of the issue, Robert Philip counters this in cheery, everyman style. 'Anyone who visits an art gallery for an exhibition or the theatre for a play', he writes, 'can expect to be given notes that explain the background

and intentions of the artist or author, written in a manner that does not patronise, but does not contain unfamiliar technical jargon'. The suggestion of the kind of fictional figure cherished by nervous arts managements the world over unwittingly forgets the true 'lover'. Like many *Gramophone* readers, he or she will surely have encountered and even welcomed a more individual curatorial viewpoint than something that merely underlines the 'background', ignoring, for a moment, the minefield of 'intentions'.

For the relatively uninitiated, however, Philip provides a sequence of solid introductions to the featured composers, offering concise but adept accounts of their lives. His grasp on the musical narratives of the chosen works is equally firm, though they lack a sense of spin or subversion. The overly braying conclusion to Mahler's Fifth Symphony, for instance, is left unquestioned, while the tumbling arpeggios of its *Adagietto* are merely described as 'simple'. And why, for instance, does Bach's Sixth *Brandenburg Concerto* give rise only to a basic comment about instrumentation rather than anything evoking its wonderfully honeyed hues? Throughout, the matter-of-fact trumps the magical, leaving less immediately dramatic works particularly wanting.

Variety of approach and a sense of context are also minimal. When the latter is included, such as a bizarre comparison between the orchestral textures in Britten's Sea Interludes from *Peter Grimes* and Haydn's *The Creation*, it's a red herring – after all, the reader cannot turn to an entry on the Haydn, given the book's purely orchestral focus. Its chief lacuna is, however, the subjective if trickier 'why' that should be part of any musical discussion, after it has provided the necessary, objective 'what' and 'how'. But as you turn through Philip's inventory of musical observations, occasionally reminding you of that fabled warning about terpsichorean approaches to architectural discourse, it becomes more a question of 'who' than 'why'.



Peter Quantrill reads an engaging conductor's reflections:

'Wigglesworth makes an attractive argument that the last-act finales of the Mozart/da Ponte trilogy gave birth to the "opera conductor"'

Who, ultimately, is this book for? Lavishly published by a university press while eschewing the academic, it claims classical music lovers for its own but fails to challenge the same. And, ultimately, it confirms a canon that even the most antediluvian concert programmer would be embarrassed to outline. Furthermore, can one author, regardless of experience, really embrace 250 years of repertoire, from Bach to Webern? For those aware that the alphabet extends a little further, Zemlinsky is, incidentally, absent, but, then, so too is the work of any member of the female sex, as well as the last five symphonies of Shostakovich, all of which fall beyond Philip's 1950 cut-off – the Tenth, from 1953, is, however, included. Perhaps, if such a gazetteer is to exist, it should have a clearer sense of audience, a broader scope and approach, and a greater variety of voice and opinion. Only then would the orchestral repertoire have gained the equal of Kobbé's guide to the operatic.

Gavin Plumley

The Silent Musician

Why Conducting Matters

By Mark Wigglesworth

Faber & Faber, HB, 272pp, £14.99

ISBN 978-0-571-33790-3



To conduct is a transitive verb. The way we see conductors, and sometimes talk about them too, may conspire to give the impression of a magus-like figure engaged in a solipsistic air-ballet of coercion and control. There are even conductors happy to leave the wider public with exactly that impression. Most of their colleagues, however, are conducting other people, fellow musicians, first and foremost. Then, in a more subtly influential way, audiences. Somewhere in that tangle of power is the music; the score; and – especially when dealing with a stage – the drama.



Mark Wigglesworth contemplates a range of topics related to conducting and the issues involved in shaping collaborative music-making

Mark Wigglesworth knows this, which is why his chapter titles address themselves in turn to the different subjects of the conductor's baton. Regular readers of *Gramophone*'s website will be acquainted with previous efforts he has made to analyse the craft of his profession without dismantling its mystique. Indeed, *The Silent Musician* reads like an expanded, studiously measured contemplation of the topics he considered some years ago as a blogger for this magazine.

Wigglesworth now aims at a broader audience, making judicious reference to established modern classics of self-examination and leadership such as Mike Brearley's *The Art of Captaincy* and *The Wisdom of Insecurity* by Alan Watts. In the preface to *A Brief History of Time*, Stephen Hawking recalls advice that the number of equations he chose to include would be inversely proportional to sales of the book. Wigglesworth and his publishers have set their course to the same compass. The introduction makes only passing reference to three composers in 11 pages. Music examples? Forget it. There is a chapter on 'Conducting Music' but *The Silent Musician* remains silent about the dots, the notes, the stuff that conductors spend their lives in service of.

In the genre of 'the art of conducting according to me', however, the shelves already groan (particularly if you read German and Russian). As they do with self-justifying apologies and back-slapping

memoirs. Wigglesworth deserves attention for trying something different. Perhaps it's partly a condition of setting down his thoughts in the middle of his career. He has left several posts at odds with the administration, notoriously English National Opera in 2016, which may also constrain anecdotal recollection. At any rate, as with the music, *The Silent Musician* also stays tight-lipped about the specifics of working with other musicians. Most of us can probably grasp for ourselves that 'there is a right sound and style for each composer' and that 'ending a rehearsal too soon in one place is as bad as using every minute of it in another'. But which composer, which places?

Most conductors of note have been either too busy, too grand or insufficiently sure of themselves as prose stylists to commit their own reflections to the page, Bruno Walter being a signal exception. The conversation format revealed lasting insights from Karajan with Richard Osborne, Boulez with Jean Vermeil and (grudgingly) Klemperer with Peter Heyworth. Their writ ran, however, while male-dominated power structures held sway. At least in countries with a hold on liberal democracy, however fragile, the age of the maestro is history. Wigglesworth knows this too, which is one reason why his first chapter is so valuable for its frank discussion of how conductors get what they want through the 'primordial language' of hands, how chimerical 'technique' encompasses more than

movement and how a 'Napoleonic power complex' buys little more than resentment.

'Conducting Drama' ventures on to more contested ground, where both prose and argument falter. Does opera 'force the performers to bare their souls'? Is there really 'a fragility to its perfume that reflects the nakedness of such emotional vulnerability'? Divas like to claim as much in breathless backstage interviews. A back-desk ENO cellist might offer a different and pithier response. Wigglesworth makes an attractive argument that the last-act finales of the Mozart/da Ponte trilogy gave birth to the 'opera conductor' much as the *Eroica* did the symphonic conductor just over a decade later. Yet few would contend that the three- or four-hour narrative arc of *The Coronation of Poppaea* does not require a guiding hand as well as a point of coordination between singers and instrumentalists. At the other end of the repertoire, it's surely giving at once too much and too little credit to Debussy, Berg and Janáček to claim that their fitting of speech and text to music 'has made the conductor's job easy'.

When Wigglesworth forsakes theory and principle for self-deprecating confession and personal observation he is at his most engaging. I may take issue with the idea that in Elgar's conducting you can hear 'Edwardian moustaches twirling', and much else besides, but, for a refreshing sense of perspective on what he concludes is 'a rather normal profession', *The Silent Musician* has plenty to say. **Peter Quantrill**

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Gershwin's Porgy and Bess

The 'great American opera' continues to cause controversy, on stage and on disc. **David Gutman** assesses the available recordings

Porgy and Bess begins with an upbeat flourish which Todd Duncan, the original Porgy, heard as being dangerously close to the blackface simplicities of its era when the composer first thumped it out for him on the piano in 1934. There had indeed been plans to turn DuBose Heyward's 1925 novel, *Porgy*, subsequently a play co-authored by Heyward's wife, Dorothy, into a Jerome Kern musical for Al Jolson. But Gershwin's treatment would be subtler: 'an American Folk Opera ... much more serious than Jolson could ever do.' Gershwin envisaged a staged, fully sung drama, using operatic techniques (recitatives, arias, leitmotifs) to depict the life of an American community with which he felt a special affinity, building on his longheld interest in the African-American experience.

In Heyward's reworked first scene, the house lights dim, a dance-hall piano takes over and the chorus's potentially embarrassing 'Da-doo-da' chanting is queried by a blaze of orchestral dissonance. All this before we segue into the first statement of 'Summertime' – comfortably familiar now yet by no means harmonically unambiguous. Listen in context and disquiet is written in, except that, even today, only three audio recordings offer this preamble complete! For 40 years one could see it in the score but only hear a variant in *Catfish Row*, which Gershwin culled from the opera. Unlike Robert Russell Bennett's accessible *Porgy and Bess: A Symphonic Picture* (1942), this 1936 orchestral suite puts through-composed material on a par with the obvious vocal hits. Even that out-of-tune upright echoes Berg's similar deployment in Act 3 of

Wozzeck (Gershwin had recently attended the American premiere).

Whether or not you regard *Porgy and Bess* as the American *Wozzeck*, it tells a similarly downbeat story. Porgy, a disabled black slum-dweller, attempts to rescue Bess from the clutches of Crown, her violent and possessive lover, and Sportin' Life, drug dealer and potential pimp. That the whole undertaking could become a signifier of degradation for many African Americans is perhaps the unintended consequence of stripping out the ennobling, distancing effect of old-world, high-art models.

The composer spent a month experiencing at first hand the music of the creole Gullah people of the Sea Islands on the Atlantic coast near Charleston, South Carolina. This is not to say that he directly 'appropriated' their culture; instead, he created original music evoking its style and sensibility while simultaneously pulling in nakedly Hebraic tropes from his own background (the similarities between 'It take a long pull to get there' and the modern folk of 'Hevnu shalom aleichem' are too close to be merely coincidental).

The work's melodic idiom is typically infused with the inflected thirds, fifths and sevenths of black American popular music, creating tunes which Wilfrid Mellers was not alone in finding 'more memorable than those of any 20th-century opera'. At the same time, Gershwin wanted *Porgy and Bess* to combine 'the drama and romance of *Carmen* and the beauty of *Meistersinger*'. For admirers on the 'classical' side of the fence, the localism suggests parallels not with minstrelsy but rather with Janáček's evocation of community where poverty of circumstance dictates



A scene from English National Opera's 2018 production of *Porgy and Bess*

morality. We see Gershwin's aptitude for melody in his arias and choruses but there is – or should be – so much more: fights animated by fugal writing, communal singing imbued with extravagant glissandi and polyrhythms, productive borrowings from Debussy and Puccini as well as the Negro spiritual. Gershwin's magnum opus could have been a staging post in his quest to create credibly American grand opera;



PHOTOGRAPH: TRISTRAM KENTON

there was seemingly no limit to what Ira described as his brother's 'reservoir of musical inventiveness, resourcefulness and craftsmanship'. Instead, that potential journey ended with his tragically premature death in 1937.

Porgy and Bess may be easier to accept now that it can be seen by desegregated audiences as a period piece rather than a distorted reflection of contemporary

reality – today's Kiawah (Kittiwah) Island is one of the premiere golf destinations on the East Coast. That said, just as *The Merchant of Venice* remains uncomfortable for anglophone Jewry, the opera's problems are not going away anytime soon. Even before opening night, questions were being raised. Could an all-white creative team speak for African Americans without reductive stereotyping?

Anne Brown, the first Bess, a 22-year-old Juilliard graduate, found her own father, a doctor, objecting to the depiction of a down-at-heel community. 'He didn't like it at all. He didn't want me to be in it. He said it perpetuated the image of blacks as lazy people, singing hymns and taking dope. A lot of the black educators thought it was Uncle Tom. But I felt that if it brought us forward in American



Leontyne Price, Cab Calloway and William Warfield performing *Porgy and Bess* in Dallas in 1952

music and in opera roles for black singers, then we should do it.'

The racial question was turned on its head when the show moved to Washington DC. With the cast refusing to sing before segregated audiences, the National Theatre suspended its policy of relegating African-American attendees to a separate section, if only for that one week. There had been other compromises. The score only reached the stage after the director Rouben Mamoulian helped refashion it into a tauter, more accessible entity pitched somewhere between through-composed *verismo* and patchwork-quilt Broadway musical. Though unprofitable, it ran in New York for a creditable 124 performances.

The requirement, still enforced by the Gershwin estate, that *Porgy and Bess* employ an all-black cast in the theatre further complicates things. The rationale is not intrinsically different from the older argument against colour-blind

casting across the board. Then again, if the main aim was to derail any prospect of a *Porgy* played in make-up, shouldn't the instruction be more fairly regarded as a form of affirmative action? It was another 20 years before Robert McFerrin, Sidney Poitier's singing voice on the soundtrack of Columbia's inauthentic film adaptation (Philips, 10/59), appeared at the Metropolitan Opera as a fully contracted African American artist. The opera had an all-white European premiere in Copenhagen before occupying Nazis forced its closure. The greatest modern exponent of the title-role is a Jamaican-born Brit. Will it always make sense to deny the lead to a suitably qualified Caucasian? In 2018, defying the approved racial context, Hungarian State Opera moved the action to a refugee centre in contemporary Europe, a gambit that worried some more than the truncations sanctioned by the estate. Lyon Opera's 2008 production (brought to Edinburgh

in 2010) remains one of the few to have subjected naturalistic representation to the scrutiny enabled by video technology.

When asked why he had extended the title to include both lovers, Gershwin replied: 'Well, there's *Tristan and Isolde*, there's *Romeo and Juliet* – why not *Porgy and Bess*?' The charge of misogyny, thrown up in part by the norms of grand opera as well as the chequered performance history of this particular piece, feels gratuitous. Bess isn't a heroine like Puccini's sturdy Californian Minnie (*La fanciulla del West*), yet to accuse the whole enterprise of ingrained prejudice is to miss the fortitude and entrepreneurialism of the Catfish Row community. Easily done if Maria's role is so pruned that her electrifying confrontation with Sportin' Life – the proto-rap of 'I hates yo' struttin' style' – disappears altogether.

PORGY ON DISC

The work's diverse recording history begins in 1935 with a modest clutch of highlights set down in the composer's presence days after the show opened and mostly with the same conductor, **Alexander Smallens**. Here the stars are established opera singers. Helen Jepson's soprano is serviceable but Lawrence Tibbett, who had performed in blackface in Louis Gruenberg's *The Emperor Jones*, makes a vocally immense, dramatically thrilling impression, not least in the ominous Act 2 aria so often cut, 'Buzzard keep on flyin' over'. It was only later that more extended excerpts featuring a mix of the original Broadway cast and 1942 revival line-up were made for Jack Kapp's American Decca label. A concatenation of those sides, retrospectively designated the official cast album (a concept originating with *Oklahoma!*), is helpfully presented in a Naxos package bringing together these early ventures and more. While Avon Long, the replacement Sportin' Life, borrows additional numbers for popular makeovers with Leo Reisman's dance band, Jascha Heifetz recasts his own favourites for violin and piano. The main (1940-42)

THE HISTORIC CHOICE

Warfield; Price; RIAS Light Orch, Berlin / **Smallens**

Audite M ② AUDITE23 405

Flawed as it is, this astonishingly vivid off-air



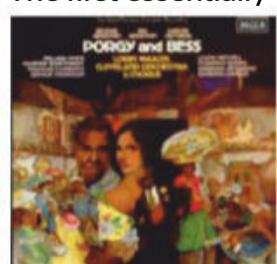
recording conveys the excitement of a classic touring production featuring one of the 20th century's greatest voices at the start of her career.

THE CLASSICAL CHOICE

White; Mitchell; Cleveland Orch / **Maazel**

Decca M ③ 475 8663DOR3

The first essentially complete *Porgy* remains

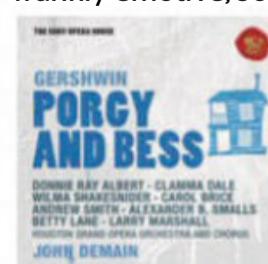


one of the finest, with maximally polished orchestral playing and arguably the strongest vocal line-up yet assembled. Maazel is at his most committed.

THE THEATRICAL CHOICE

Albert; Dale; Houston Grand Op Orch / **DeMain**
RCA M ② 88697 98511-2

Less carefully manicured but more frankly emotive, John DeMain's first



recorded *Porgy* was made during the long theatrical run which restored the work's operatic credentials in the United States.

sequence finds Anne Brown a trifle prim, reluctant to embrace a patois that might be thought demeaning.

Commercial success arrived with the contemporaneous touring revival directed by Cheryl Crawford. With recitative converted into spoken dialogue, *Porgy* became a kind of exotic musical comedy, its hits performed ever faster with the jerky inflections of hand-cranked silent film. Bucking the trend, 1951 saw Columbia Masterworks' Goddard Lieberson record the work 'complete' in the studio. The text is scarcely that but does at least restore much of the network of recurring motifs associated with people, places and aspirations. Conducted by **Lehman Engel**, the cast takes in Long's insinuating *Sportin' Life*, 'a model of voiceless resourcefulness', as *Opera* magazine commented later. The sound, rather dry and boxy, favours the voices. Surprising then to discover that the set was such an inspiration for aspiring producer John Culshaw, impressed by its innovative sound effects and manufactured theatrical continuity.

More remarkable is the recently disinterred German radio tape of Blevins Davis and Robert Breen's famous all-black touring production, again under **Smallens**. Sponsored by the US State Department, this 'contradictory cultural symbol' reached Moscow late in 1955, albeit losing its initial lustre as original cast members moved on. Even if the 1952 recording is heard today as textually unsatisfactory (provoking the particular ire of Nikolaus Harnoncourt), it has noisy theatrical energy and provides the earliest evidence of the limitless vocal potential of Leontyne Price. Her then husband William Warfield occasionally sounds strained or lightweight but it should be recognised that he was singing from a kneeling position, authentically confined to Porgy's goat cart. The multitalented Cab Calloway as *Sportin' Life* is a powerful presence too, transmuting the 'dandified' stereotype into something more compelling in his celebrated rendition of 'It ain't necessarily so'. The mono sound has come up superbly. Absent however are such key elements as the glorious orchestral coda of Act 1 scene 1 when Porgy takes in Bess after Robbins's murder. The pivotal 'Buzzard Song' can hardly suggest a world turning to its dark side when it's patched into the final scene. Supporting roles are less strongly taken; the three acts become two.

With the original opera languishing in obscurity, extended jazz-orientated selections were offered by such artists as Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald (HMV, 10/59) and Miles Davis



Gershwin in 1935, putting the final touches to his 'folk opera'

and Gil Evans (Fontana, 11/59). Leontyne Price's escalating fame inspired a 'Summertime' alongside Herbert von Karajan and the Vienna Philharmonic for the interpolated Gala sequence of Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus* (Decca, 11/60), later a legendary RCA LP in which she takes on all the female showstoppers, singing with imperious command under **Skitch Henderson**. The brisk tempo for 'Bess, you is my woman now' obscures the status of that mutated tango as one of the great operatic duets. Warfield returns but the novelty is the appearance of Gershwin's original *Sportin' Life*, John W Bubbles, a vaudeville star unable to read music. McHenry Boatwright is glimpsed as Crown, the role he would sing in its entirety for **Lorin Maazel** in 1975.

Amid continuing copyright battles and political debate, the imminence of America's bicentennial year prompted that first genuinely uncut studio production, the biggest step-change in the work's

recording history. Any lack of pizzazz is forgivable when the line-up of soloists is so strong. Sixty singers were auditioned, all black, unlike the Cleveland Chorus and Orchestra. 'How glorious it is to hear the entire opera, without the dozens of cuts which have mutilated form, flow and dramatic tension', Maazel wrote. Glorious, too, to hear the young Willard White's deft, mellifluous Porgy and the radiant Clara of Barbara Hendricks. Florence Quivar is magnificent as Serena while Barbara Conrad, no stranger to entrenched segregationism, introduces the new, feistier Maria.

Those who detect a certain coolness and deliberation about the conducting may prefer the set recorded the

following year in studio sessions associated with the New York run of the innovative Houston Grand Opera production under **John DeMain**. The singers' names may be less recognisable, the orchestral sonorities rawer, but the experience is equally compelling. Understandably squeamish about the use of the N-word, 1930s performers tended to mask its every occurrence with stage business until it was formally removed from the script. Conversely, for a modern audience the absence of harsh language can make *Porgy* feel cosy or patronising. When the police arrive after Robbins's murder, we barely notice the non-singing white detective's harangue if he addresses Porgy as 'you damn dummy' (assuming the section isn't cut). With Maazel we wait impatiently for the music to start up again. Only DeMain's character actor Hansford Rowe, pointing up the degradation endured by black America, has us reeling in shock. Donnie Ray Albert also takes risks;

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS

RECORDING DATE	ARTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1940-42	Duncan ^P ; Brown ^B ; Decca SO / Smallens [original cast recordings, etc]	Naxos B 8 110219/20 (4/53 ^R)
1951	Winters ^P ; Williams ^B ; orch / Engel	Naxos B 8 110287/8 (10/55 ^R)
1952	Warfield ^P ; Price ^B ; RIAS Light Orch, Berlin / Smallens	Audite M ② AUDITE23 405; Guild F ② GHCD2313/14 (8/08)
1963	Warfield ^P ; Price ^B ; RCA Victor Orch / Henderson [highlights]	RCA F ② 09026 63312-2 (1/64 ^R , 4/89 ^R)
1975	White ^P ; Mitchell ^B ; Cleveland Orch / Maazel	Decca M ③ 475 8663DOR3; S ③ 478 5785 (4/76 ^R)
1976	Albert ^P ; Dale ^B ; Houston Grand Op Orch / DeMain	RCA M ② 88697 98511-2 (9/77 ^R)
1988	White ^P ; Haymon ^B ; LPO / Rattle	Warner Classics B ③ 9029 59006-4 (6/89 ^R)
1993	White ^P ; Haymon ^B ; LPO / Rattle	Warner Classics F ② DVD 492497-9 (10/01 ^R)
2006	Powell ^P ; Lister ^B ; Nashville SO / Mauceri	Decca F ② 475 7877DHO2 (12/06)
2009	Owens ^P ; Mitchell ^B ; San Francisco Op Orch / DeMain	EuroArts F ② DVD 205 9638; F Blu-ray 205 9634 (7/14)
2009	Lemalu ^P ; Kabatu ^B ; COE / Harnoncourt	RCA F ③ 88697 59176-2 (1/10)

Key: ^PPorgy ^BBess

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'Vocally definitive': Willard White in the 1986 Glyndebourne production conducted by Simon Rattle

although his Porgy is bassier than any since Lawrence Tibbett, the timbre fraying under pressure, he takes the highest option at the end of his final solo, conveying the character's desperation.

PORGY COMES TO EUROPE

In the UK, Glyndebourne's 1986 production played a similar role to Houston's, boosting *Porgy*'s operatic credentials. As recorded in Abbey Road after **Simon Rattle**'s subsequent concert performances, Willard White's 'older', less grateful voice suits the plot: it is indicative that he now parts company with his younger self in the pitching of 'I got to be wid Bess'. (A 2012 rendition is accessible in the Berlin Philharmonic's Digital Concert Hall). As with DeMain, there's a feeling of oneness about the project, plus added vocal glamour: the short-lived Bruce Hubbard provides a matchless Jake and it would be difficult to trump Gregg Baker's imposing Crown. The biggest revelations (and controversies) are associated with Rattle's 'extremism' in the pit. Setting a whirlwind tempo for the opening bars, he is at his dreamiest in a 'Summertime' reached by way of Wayne Marshall's unexpurgated bar-room piano. Every texture is freshly imagined, the (unabridged) street cries never so beautiful, the drama never so intense.

When the same recording served as the soundtrack of the acclaimed 1993 television production, some regrettable cuts were made. The lip-synching is odd, Fellini-esque in its imprecision. Perhaps director Trevor Nunn, taking charge again for this expansion of his Glyndebourne staging, wanted mouths to open only

so far. Is there an element of deception in having two principals, one recently deceased, impersonated by stand-ins? The deployment of crutches in lieu of the prescribed goat cart necessitates some limited re-recording – 'Won't nobody help me go?' – though the precise nature of Porgy's disability matters less than the excision *again* of the 'Buzzard Song'.

Less of the score survives in the sonically parched audio-visual alternative from 2009, which pairs bulky Wagnerian Eric Owens with the alluring Laquita Mitchell. One wonders what **John DeMain**, conducting San Francisco Opera's 1950s-set two-acter, really thought of it. However unpoetic the cry of 'Bring my crutch' towards the close, it was brave to imply that the protagonists will find no happiness in the material world. Clever, too, to have Bess wear a flamboyant wig so that Crown's 'A red-headed woman' makes sense amid the sound and fury of the storm. Such perceptive touches reflect credit on producer Francesca Zambello. The cuts do not.

Sadly the 21st century has seen more abridgements – Nunn even blotted his copybook with 2006's ill-advised 'musical' – while isolated audio recordings have added little of value. Promising on paper, **John Mauceri**'s 2006 revival of Mamoulian's text (reinstating all those opening-night cuts) seems dutiful rather than inspired. The deliberate tempos pall, authentic or not, and the partial restoration of the final scene's 'occupational humoresque' of percussive domestic activity scarcely compensates for earlier excisions. Nicole Cabell (Clara) is the one big-name participant.

A long-form 'Symphony of Noises' also features in **Nikolaus Harnoncourt**'s more dynamic 2009 recording from Graz's Styriarte festival. The Chamber Orchestra of Europe, slender but incisive, trump even Rattle's LPO in the quest for intriguing sonorities. The leads are poor: Isabelle Kabatu (Bess) a late substitution with poor diction, Jonathan Lemalu (Porgy) unacceptably gritty. The spoken parts carry no conviction. Still, the veterans shine: Roberta Alexander as Maria, Gregg Baker reprising his Crown. Harnoncourt's booklet-notes are wonderfully provocative, even if he shoots himself in the foot musically with his own eccentric selection from existing sources.

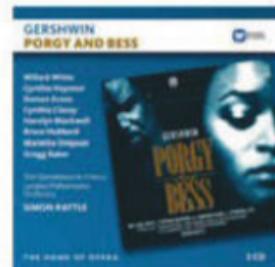
Despite the efforts of Maazel, DeMain, Rattle et al, the re-emergence of a supposed urtext has proved less than transformative. So might an officially sanctioned revamp do the trick? Criticised for bowing to commercial imperatives and exaggerating Ira's role as Porgy's co-lyricist (with Heyward), the estate has lately embarked on an initiative to present scholarly imprints of the brothers' oeuvre. Wayne D Shirley's draft *Porgy* is an hour longer than ENO's rendering and there are plans for performance material to be made available for the Met's upcoming revival. On record, as in the theatre, the 'definitive' version remains a holy grail, always just out of reach, not quite anchored in that category reserved for inviolable masterpieces. *Porgy*'s textual imponderables might appear inconsequential beside the vicissitudes of such grandly significant art music staples as *Don Carlos* or *Boris Godunov*, the songs enjoying a vibrant, genre-bending life in the wider world where the opera's contentious nature and plotline matter less, but it ain't necessarily so. For the purpose of this article we need a first choice and, with Willard White's most moving incarnation of Porgy set against a canvas of vivid textures and provocative tempos, it's Rattle's 1988 recording by a nose. **G**

THE LIBRARY CHOICE

White; Haymon; LPO / Rattle

Warner Classics ② ③ 9029 59006-4

Willard White's second *Porgy*, vocally less fresh but by now definitive, is complemented by a practised cast and unashamedly interventionist conducting.



In abbreviated form, this courageous, dynamic interpretation also provided the soundtrack for the first made-for-television production of the opera.

PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

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Gasteig, Munich & live on BR-Klassik

Beethoven for Haitink's 90th, February 22

Bernard Haitink turns 90 on March 4, and he's marking this milestone with a series of celebratory performances with some of the orchestras closest to him. This guest appearance with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and Chorus stands out not simply for its über-celebratory main event of Beethoven's *Choral* Symphony No 9 (with soloists Sally Matthews, Gerhild Romberger, Mark Padmore and Gerald Finley), but also for opening with a Beethoven work that's rarely seen on either a concert programme or on a recording: the cantata *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*, based on verses by Goethe (which he dedicated to Beethoven) which describe a sailing ship in irons. The concert is available in the archive after the event, so you don't need to catch it live.

br-klassik.de, en.geistag.de

Metropolitan Opera, New York & cinemas worldwide

La fille du Régiment, March 2

Originally a co-commission by the Met, the Royal Opera House and the Wiener Staatsoper, Laurent Pelly's First World War setting for Donizetti's frothy comedy gets

a Stateside re-airing this month under the baton of Enrique Mazzola. Heading up his cast are Javier Camarena as Tonio (the tenor who gets those nine high Cs in 'Ah, mes amis!') and Pretty Yende as Marie. They're then joined by Maurizio Muraro as Sergeant Sulpice, Stephanie Blythe as the Marquise of Berkenfield and Kathleen Turner, no less, in the non-singing role of the Duchess of Krakenthorp.

metopera.org

Finnish National Opera, Helsinki & live online via OperaVision

Ulla-Lena Lundberg's acclaimed novel *Ice* gets the operatic treatment, March 5

With domestic sales of almost 150,000 copies, Finnish author Ulla-Lena Lundberg's novel *Ice* has become one of the most cherished Finnish novels of the decade, and in 2012 it won Finland's most prestigious literary award, the Finlandia Prize. As a result, Jaakko Kuusisto's new operatic staging of it for Finnish National Opera (to a libretto by Juhani Koivisto) is a major event, because they're the first of many interested theatrical companies to get permission to adapt it for the stage. The story itself is centred on a young priest who settles on a remote Finnish island, based

in part on the life on Lundberg's own family on the isolated island of Kökar, and Kuusisto's music reflects both the changing seasons and the ever-present threat of ice. Conducted by Anna Kelo, the lead role of Petter Kummel is sung for this OperaVision live-streamed performance by Ville Rusanen.

opperabaletti.fi/en, operavision.eu

Philharmonie, Berlin & online at the digital concert hall

Schoenberg from Patricia Kopatchinskaja, March 9

This visit to Berlin from Patricia Kopatchinskaja comprises two different concerts in one evening, and it's sounding every bit as individual as we've come to expect from this highly creative violinist. For the main evening concert with Kirill Petrenko and the Berliner Philharmoniker she's the soloist in Schoenberg's Violin Concerto, paired with Tchaikovsky's Symphony No 5. Then comes a Late Night concert for which she performs not only as violin soloist but also as narrator in Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*, and this programme also includes Schoenberg's and Webern's arrangements of waltzes by Johann Strauss II.

digitalconcerthall.com

ONLINE OPERA REVIEW

An enchanting and intelligent conservatoire production of Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*, directed by a great singer

Mozart

This production from the Royal College of Music is directed by Sir Thomas Allen, a former student and a wonderful Count, both at Covent Garden and on the Solti/Decca recording. What a pleasure it is to encounter a gimmick-free performance that, unobtrusively and sensitively conducted by Michael Rosewell, flows seamlessly from overture to finale. The three hours are gone in a flash.

The set designs by Lottie Higglett subtly illuminate the drama. No luxury for the Figaros' new bedroom, but an armchair that has seen better days and what looks like a very narrow bed. The



garden is adorned with a replica of the Venus de Milo, perhaps symbolising the Almavivas' broken marriage. Allen's direction is a masterpiece of positioning and timing: the discovery of Cherubino in Act 1 is beautifully done. His only lapse

is in allowing Figaro to lounge on the sofa in the presence of his master; though admittedly it's the Countess who helps him to rest his supposedly injured foot.

The uniformly excellent cast includes Julieth Lozano as a sexy, pure-toned Susanna and Josephine Goddard as a dignified, wounded Countess. Adam Maxey is a Figaro to be

reckoned with; Henry Thatcher delivers a powerful account of Almaviva's aria. Watching this will bring sunshine into the dreariest day. **Richard Lawrence**
Available to view, free of charge, until March 26, 2019 at operavision.eu

Barbican, London & live on YouTube

Till Fellner joins Haitink with the LSO, March 10

Bernard Haitink's birthday celebrations continue past the big day itself, including this one which sees him in London to conduct the LSO, who are in fact celebrating his 90th with a whole series of concerts. They open with Mozart's Piano Concerto in E flat, No 22 (K482), with Till Fellner. Then for the programme's second half Haitink turns to a composer whose symphonies have been at the centre of his career over the decades: Anton Bruckner, and his Symphony No 4. If you're watching online via the LSO's YouTube channel then you can tune in half an hour earlier at 6.30pm for a live introduction from backstage.

iso.co.uk/whats-on/live-streamed-concerts

La Monnaie, Brussels & live online both on the La Monnaie website and via OperaVision

Frankenstein, March 15

Commissioned by La Monnaie, Mark Grey's opera *Frankenstein* is his first full-length opera, and this live-streamed performance of its premiere run - a distinctly 21st-century interpretation high on video and audio technology, created by La Fura dels Baus's Álex Olé - should be well worth catching. Obviously it's based on the Mary Shelley novel, but it's been reworked as a philosophical reflection on the human condition of our time, and on the technology that gives humankind power over life and death on Earth, whilst also warning society against casting out the individual. Bassem Akiki conducts the La Monnaie orchestra and chorus with a cast featuring Scott Hendricks as Victor Frankenstein, Topi Lehtipuu as the Creature, and Eleonore Margeurre as Elizabeth.

lamonnaie.be, Operavision.eu

Wigmore Hall, London & online via Wigmore Hall Live

Christoph Prégardien sings Schubert's Winterreise - transcribed, March 21

If this combination of forces for this particular song cycle - singer, wind ensemble and accordion - is new to you and sounding like an unlikely one, then worry not. Firstly because Prégardien, Canadian wind ensemble Pentaèdre and accordionist Joseph Petric already have under their belts a well-received 2013 recording of this transcription, which was worked by the ensemble's Artistic Director Normand Forget; and indeed Prégardien's own *Winterreise* discography also features a 'straight' reading with Michael Gees on piano for Challenge Classics, which was very well reviewed in these pages (A/13). Good news then that Wigmore Hall is live-streaming this opportunity to experience this most famous of works through a decidedly different lens.

wigmorehall.org.uk

ONLINE CONCERT REVIEW

Iván Fischer brings his characteristically original approach to Schubert

Iván Fischer and Christian Gerhaher



Photo: Monika Rittershaus

The lieder of Hugo Wolf are unique in their clear-cut directness. Their aim is not the artistic sublimation of emotions, but real, unfiltered expression. Christian Gerhaher, the "foremost lieder singer of our time" (*The New York Times*), performs selected settings by Wolf of Goethe and Mörike. Conductor Iván Fischer also presents Franz Schubert's *Great Symphony*, with its shifts between the idyllic and the abyss.

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Hugo Wolf

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Christian Gerhaher baritone

Franz Schubert

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Interview

An introduction by Iván Fischer

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Dvořák · Schubert · Wolf

In the first half of a beautifully programmed concert shortly before Christmas, Iván Fischer led the Berlin Philharmonic through suave accounts of Dvořák (the Sixth and Tenth *Legends*) and Hugo Wolf, both speaking in Schubertian tongues, before turning to their source of inspiration with a quirky *Great C major*.

In the *Harfenspieler Lieder*, a score-bound Christian Gerhaher struggles to reconcile Goethe's contemplations of solitude with the demands of projecting to the far corners of the Philharmonie, for all Fischer's sympathetic accompanying hand. The declamation of Mörike's mysterious 'Feuerreiter' suits him better, set against the glittering colours of a brand-new orchestration by Eivin Buene, complete with *col legno* and slithering glissandi effects to depict the song's chilling conclusion.

Fischer is reliably full of new ideas both off the podium (in an accompanying interview) and on it, where he brings the BPO's wind players to the front of the stage for Schubert's Eighth Symphony. It's a strategy I've seen deployed in earlier Schubert symphonies, and it certainly skews the balance of the piece in a way that would have given Karajan kittens. The role of the trombones (as a voice of Nature/God) is significantly diminished, and the strings fiddle away for much of the finale to disconcertingly little effect. Fischer slashes away at the repeats yet brings in the symphony at 53 minutes with a sturdy first-movement *Allegro*, and a rhythmically sprung but resolute *Andante* that recedes to a sombre point of uneasy repose: not so remote from Karajan after all.

Peter Quantrill

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2017 as titular organist of the Elbphilharmonie's Klais organ in Hamburg.

takt1.com

Concertgebouw, Amsterdam & Takt1

Jansons conducts Dvořák and Saint-Saëns, March 22

It's a symphonic double-bill from the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra's Emeritus Conductor Mariss Jansons on this return to Amsterdam, but rather than direct his old ensemble, this time he brings his Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra to the Concertgebouw. First comes Dvořák's Symphony No 7, something of a Jansons speciality. Then after the interval comes Saint-Saëns's *Organ Symphony No 3*, and you'll want to pay special attention to its soloist, the Latvian organist Iveta Apkalna, because while she's not so regularly to be seen on UK shores as yet (with the notable exception of her BBC Proms debut last summer), she's served since

Orchestra Hall, Detroit & online

Simone Lamsma plays the Sibelius Violin Concerto, March 23

The young Dutch violinist Simone Lamsma's concert diary is increasingly packed with impressive debut appearances, so if you're yet to see her in concert, here's an opportunity, and in one of the greatest violin concertos, the Sibelius. On the conductor's podium is Mark Wigglesworth, so no surprise that the rest of his programme is a British one: Delius's *The Walk to Paradise Garden*, and then Vaughan Williams's Symphony No 5.

dso.org

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Speakers for every budget

KEF has simplified its LS50W model to create the LSX, while McIntosh scales down its flagship XRT2.1K

When KEF launched its LS50 Wireless speakers ①, there was a little confusion about what exactly the design was; yes it was an active version of the successful LS50 it introduced to mark its 50th anniversary, but there was more to the design than that. Built into the speakers, along with all the amplification required, was a complete wireless streaming system, enabling the speakers to play music from local sources and online services without the need for any additional electronics.

Now KEF has made the concept even more attractive with the arrival of the smaller, simpler LSX model, selling for around half the price of the original at £999. Using the company's Uni-Q drive unit, which combines a tweeter and a mid/bass unit, plus onboard amplification, the LSX will play music from network storage as well as online streaming services such as Spotify and Tidal, plus internet radio. It uses KEF's Music Integrity Engine digital signal processing to optimise the performance, especially in the areas of bass clarity and distortion reduction, and can also stream direct from tablets, phones and computers using Bluetooth, with Apple AirPlay 2 on the way soon.

It might be strange to describe speakers selling for £59,995/pr as more affordable, but that's the case with the XRT1.1K from American manufacturer McIntosh ②: although still a large floorstander, it's a scaled-down version of the company's XRT2.1K flagship, which is £137,500 a pair! In fact the new speaker is 78kg and 35cm shorter than the original, yet still uses the company's nanocarbon driver technology, and an array of no fewer than 70 drive units per speaker. In addition



to four bass units and two lower-midrange drivers, each speaker has 24 upper-mid drivers and 40 tweeters, mounted in a line array in front of the main cabinet, the idea being to create a coherent stereo image over a wide listening area, both horizontally from side to side and with varying distance from the speakers.

Also aimed at the high end is another US-made speaker, the Wilson Sasha DAW ③, the model designation being in honour of company founder David Wilson, who died in 2018. The new model replaces the Sasha Series 2, and uses a dual-enclosure design, the upper housing the same 17.8cm midrange driver and 2.54cm tweeter the company uses in its £700,000/pr WAMM Master Chronosonic loudspeaker, and the lower a pair of 20.3cm bass units. The speakers are handmade in Wilson's factory in Utah, and start from £39,998, with custom finishes available to match customer's own colour requirements at a £4000 premium.

Quad has announced an updated version of its compact Vena amplifier, the Vena II ④, which sells from £649 depending on finish. Retained are the original's USB and digital inputs, plus Bluetooth wireless connectivity, while a new addition is a high-quality JFET-based moving magnet phono stage. The digital and analogue sections have been upgraded, with the implementation of



ESS Technology's ES9018K2M DAC, which includes HyperStream architecture and Time Domain Jitter Eliminator for ultra-low noise and wide dynamics. This new DAC also extends the Vena II's file compatibility, which now runs to 384kHz/32bit and DSD256. The standard finish is Quad's Lancaster Grey, while three premium wooden wraps are available, in sapele mahogany, or gloss black or white, for a £100 premium. The amp is also available in its standard finish packaged with Quad's S-1 bookshelf speakers for £999, offering a £150 saving.

Denon has boosted its headphone range with the £219 AH-C820W Bluetooth wireless model ⑤, with the electronics housed in a neckband, and earpieces using the company's Denon Double Air Compression Driver technology for bass power and clarity - the first time this design has been used in a wireless in-ear model. The earphones come complete with memory foam Comply TZ-500 eartips for a snug fit, while Acoustic Optimiser ports behind the dual drivers enhance dynamics, and can be used with the free Denon Audio app for tablets and smartphones, allowing tuning of the sound and providing access to a huge range of online radio stations and on-demand programmes. **G**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Audiolab 6000CDT/6000A

This new pairing from Audiolab makes an excellent disc-playing system

Back in the 1980s, when Audiolab was founded, its 8000A amplifier was a fascinating product: designed with ease of use firmly in mind, it was a flexible device, but with a design at odds with the fussy 'bells and whistles' designs at the time coming out of the major Japanese manufacturers. Adopting a subtle, slimline look, finished in grey, the original model had large controls arranged across its front panel, including tone adjustments and separate record and listen selectors, and a distinctly utilitarian air about it – the downside of which was somewhat tinny sheet metal in its casework, which clanged when struck.

Nevertheless, the range developed from this first product had definite appeal for what turned out to be exceptional reliability and more or less bombproof functionality: the colour became black, and the 8000A begat preamp and power amplifiers, both stereo and mono, the company adding features such as a neat selector switch allowing the integrated amplifier's pre and power stages to be disconnected from each other. That allowed the insertion of surround sound processors and the like without lots of plugging and unplugging.

As a reviewing tool the Audiolab system was ideal: it was highly revealing of the components with which it was used, and able to drive almost any speakers without signs of stress. At one point in an earlier life I was running an 8000C preamp and a stack of four 8000M monobloc amplifiers, which were more than adequate for the tiny flat in which I was living at the time!

After a brief – well, briefer than was planned – sojourn in the hands of the TAG McLaren (best-known for its Formula 1

AUDIOLAB 6000CDT

Type CD transport

Price £379

Outputs Coaxial/optical digital

Other connections Trigger in/out for remote unit switching

Accessories supplied Remote handset

Finishes Black, silver

Dimensions (WxHxD) 44.5x6.55x30cm



AUDIOLAB 6000A

Type Integrated amplifier

Price £599

Inputs MM phono, three line, two optical/two coaxial digital, power amp in, Bluetooth with aptX

Outputs Preamplifier output, one pair of speakers, headphones

Other connections Trigger in/out, USB Type

A for updates

Power output 50Wpc into 8ohms, 75Wpc into 4ohms

Accessories supplied Remote handset

Finishes Black, silver

Dimensions (WxHxD) 44.5x6.55x30cm

audiolab.co.uk

team and sports cars), when the brand became TAG McLaren Audio and moved sharply upmarket, it was sold in 2004 to IAG. Joining brands such as Mission, Quad and Wharfedale, and reverting back to its original name, Audiolab's products are now made in the company's huge manufacturing complex in Shenzhen, China, where development continues based on both the original designs and the work put in under TAG McLaren ownership.

That has seen the 8000 series upgraded and updated over successive generations – the current models being designated 8300 – and the introduction of compact designs designated 'M-', including a successful range of digital-to-analogue converters and the 'half-width' M-One amplifier. There

has even been a brief sighting of the very expensive sculptural F1 loudspeakers from the TMA years, though it remains to be seen whether these will become production models once more.

Slotting in below the mainstay 8300 models, the 6000 series we have here is designed to allow a more affordable route into ownership of 'full size' Audiolab components. Selling for £599 and £379 respectively, the first two products in this new line are the 6000A integrated amplifier and – somewhat unusually – a CD transport, the 6000CDT.

Audiolab says the 6000A harks back to the impact the original 8000A had on the market back in 1983, but it's clearly derived from the pricier 8300A (£899), with its

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WHARFEDALE D330

The largest model in the overperforming Wharfedale budget speaker range, this floorstander has a big, powerful sound



lozenge-shaped central display and clean lines, and indeed was developed by the same lead electronics designer, Jan Ertner. Meanwhile the 6000CDT is a unique product in the company's range – the 8300 series equivalent is a full-blown CD player, complete with the onboard DAC the 6000 model lacks.

The transport and amplifier approach makes perfect sense, given that, unlike the all-analogue 8300A, the 6000A has high-quality digital-to-analogue conversion built-in, in the form of the ESS Technology ES9018 Sabre 32 Reference chip found in other Audiolab products since the 2011 original M-DAC, and four digital inputs. By making the CD player a 'digital out only' transport, the company has avoided duplication of effort, and allowed the 6000CDT to concentrate on the extraction of data from discs – as well as bringing the price down.

The amplifier is extremely well equipped for the money: in addition to those four digital ins – two coaxial, two optical – it has a low-noise moving magnet phono stage, three line inputs, integrated Bluetooth aptX wireless connectivity, and a dedicated headphone amplifier. The digital section offers a choice of three filters to shape the sound, and the amplifier delivers 50W per channel into an 8ohm load, or 75Wpc into 4ohms.

There are also preout and power amp in sockets, the amp featuring the famous Audiolab mode selector, offering a choice of normal integrated working, Pre-Power mode which disconnects the two sections internally, and Pre mode, designed to be used if the system is later expanded with additional power amps.

The CD transport, which – like the amp – is available in black or silver, uses the same slot-loading dedicated CD mechanism as the 8300CD, with a read-ahead digital buffer to increase its ability to read scratched, dirty or damaged discs. The transport section is in an electromagnetically shielded enclosure, and has its own power supply.

A temperature-compensated crystal oscillator controls the master clock, and this combines with a differential line driver on the coaxial output – there's also an optical out – to deliver the best possible

digital datastream to a connected DAC, such as the 32-bit converter in the amp.

PERFORMANCE

The 6000CDT and 6000A are so obviously designed to work together that one can effectively view them as a whole – a fine system to which one simply needs add speakers, controllable using a single handset, and all for under £1000. Yes, you could use the amp or – to a lesser extent – the transport in a mix and match system, but the appeal of the two together is hard to overlook.

The sound is just as persuasive as the package, with the usual Audiolab balance of detail and dynamics, plus a little more warmth than some still associate with the brand. In truth, the original Audiolabs were never as antiseptic as their critics would have you believe – it's just that many of their contemporaries were a bit 'hyped up' in the bass to give them a false sense of scale.

The fast, revealing sound does require a little care when it comes to speaker matching, as the player and amp aren't as forgiving of lightweight sounding speakers as some electronics out there. But there's always the option of smoothing out the sound a bit using the 'Phase' filter option: this doesn't boost the bass, but it does soften the treble a little, and one can experiment with the filter settings from your listening seat, using the remote control.

Audiolab's signature sonic balance is well-suited to the demands of classical music, giving fine insight into scoring, performance and recording, creating impressive three-dimensional soundstage images and having all the dynamic ability required to bring out the drama of a piece. The music flows in a natural fashion, and there's nothing over-analytical or mechanical about the presentation, whether one listens to solo piano or a large orchestral/choral work.

By the standards of some rather more expensive rivals from, say Marantz or Pioneer, the Audiolab is a little light in the bass, but it makes good use of what it has down there, and the taut low-frequency definition and the kind of speakers with which this combination will be used means

Or you could try ...

Audiolab has taken a novel approach to its CD player and amplifier combination, but it's possible to achieve the same effect with a more conventional set-up.

Denon 800NE

The Denon 800NE series, for example, comprises a highly affordable trio of components – network and CD players, plus an integrated amplifier – allowing you to mix and match a system to suit your needs. Prices start at £349 for the DCD-800NE CD player. Find out more at denon.co.uk



Marantz 6006

Denon stablemate Marantz now has a similar offering in its 6006 series, which has recently gained an exceptionally good network player in the form of the £549 NA6006. It joins the established CD6006 and PM6006 models, which are the latest versions of long-running Marantz components, and great value. For more details see marantz.co.uk, and as with the Denons, shop around for great deals on these components.



Cambridge Audio CXC

Cambridge Audio has long been making high-quality separates at affordable prices, and the current CX range is no exception. Like the Audiolab 6000CDT, the Cambridge CXC is a transport-only CD machine, and the perfect match for the CXA60 integrated amplifier's digital inputs. And if you want to add network playback to the system, you can add on the CXN V2 player to create a multisource system for under £1500. For details, see richersounds.com, the sole retailer for Cambridge Audio in the UK.



it never sounds thin or insubstantial. Instead, the impression is of a well-balanced, highly competitive package, and just the thing for those of us still committed to playing music on disc. 

REVIEW KEF R3

Speakers refined

This standmount model, from one of the best-known British speaker names, is an impressive performer

By current fashion, the new KEF R3 speaker is fairly large for the only standmount model in its range; standing 43cm tall, it's somewhat at odds with other recent introductions such as the Bowers & Wilkins 607 and the Wharfedale D310. It's also a very long way from the idea of a budget-priced 'bookshelf' speaker: in a choice of three finishes – gloss black or white, or walnut – it sells for £1300 a pair, to which must also be added the cost of suitable stands if required.

But then the R3, like the rest of the new R Series, is a rather superior design, aimed higher than the entry-level ranges of other manufacturers. In creating the new range, the company has made a number of changes from the models it replaces – well, actually 1043 changes, leading it to say that 'The only thing to remain the same is the name'. Refinements and evolutionary changes abound in this latest line-up, which ranges all the way up to the £4000/pr R11, the largest of three floorstanders and just under 1.3m tall with its plinth and spikes fitted; while most of the changes are under the skin, there are also obvious innovations here, not least drive units colour-coded to the cabinet finish chosen, and toned grilles in an attractive suede-like finish.

These are undeniably handsome speakers, looking both modern and minimalist: no shiny trim rings or garish badging here, but instead simple, clean lines with the celebrated KEF Uni-Q drive unit at the heart of the visual appeal as well as the sound of the speakers. And that driver, which places the high-frequency tweeter at the centre of the midrange cone for a more coherent sound is also at the centre of the development work behind the new R Series model.

First employed in the company's C Series speakers just over 30 years ago, the Uni-Q is now in its 12th generation, having been the subject of continuous development and refinement over its history. New for the R Series is a redesigned motor system to improve the midrange performance of the speakers, and a reworking of the gap between the two driver elements – a 25mm vented aluminium dome tweeter and a 12.5cm midrange cone, also made from aluminium.

The gap is required to avoid interference between the two, but has in the past been

prone to resonances; in this new driver a changed structure and improved damping has removed this effect, for a cleaner, more detailed treble performance. The whole driver is also now surrounded by KEF's 'Shadow Flare' trim, designed to reduce diffraction effects at the edge of the unit.

The 16.5cm hybrid aluminium bass unit here has also been reworked, with improvements including greater excursion – or throw – along with a more powerful motor and a new high-rigidity cone. The intention is to deliver more, better bass, enabling the use of smaller drivers and thus slimmer cabinets.

Inherited from the little LS50 speakers is the Constrained Layer Damping brace system, which uses lossy connections between the braces and the cabinet panels to reduce resonances, while KEF's innovative flexible wall port-tubes in the bass tuning reduce resonances for a less coloured midrange and bass.

Biwirable terminals are provided, with neat knobs to make an internal switch between using single terminals or both – there's no worry about using jumper bars or wire links here.

The R3 reveal themselves to be quite remarkable speakers, with striking bass weight for their size

With magnetic fixings keeping the speakers clean-looking when the grilles are removed, KEF has nonetheless catered for those preferring their drive units covered: the suede-effect microfibre of the grilles means heavy frames aren't required, thus reducing diffraction. Meanwhile precision-cut perforations in front of each driver – over 1800 of them – ensure greater sonic transparency exactly where it's needed, as well as 'shadowing' the driver configuration when the grilles are in place.

PERFORMANCE

This last attention to detail is clear when listening to the R3 speakers: there's no discernible difference between the sound of the speakers with grilles on or off, which will please those who like a sleek look – and disappoint anyone used to tuning the treble by fitting or removing these covers!

KEF R3

Type Three-way standmount speakers

Price £1299/pr

Drive units 25mm dome tweeter, 12.5cm midrange, 16.5cm woofer

Sensitivity 87dB/W/m

Impedance 8ohms nominal, 3.2ohms minimum

Recommended amp power 15-180W

Finishes Black gloss, white gloss, walnut, with matching drivers/grilles

Accessories supplied Two-part foam port bungs

Dimensions (HxWxD)
42.2x20x33.5cm (inc terminals)

kef.com



The speakers are also fairly tolerant of positioning – KEF suggests a minimum of 22.5cm from the rear wall and 0.5m from the side walls, and provides a two-stage concentric foam 'bung' for use in the rear-venting port to reduce and tighten up the bass if required. Used at the minimum distance from the back wall, the outer foam ring alone will reduce the low-frequency hump created by boundary reinforcement, while adding the centre section to the bung should smooth it out completely.

Imaging is good with the speakers firing straight out into the room but I still found a slight toe-in to the listening position advantageous. Angling the speakers in so the outer sidewalls of the cabinet were just visible from my seat had the effect of making the soundstage picture sharper of focus, while also enhancing the impression of front-to-back depth.

That done, the R3 reveal themselves to be quite remarkable speakers, with striking bass weight for their size bringing realistic scale to everything from solo piano recordings to large-scale orchestral works. And the levels of detail and insight on offer are just as notable, the whole performance being presented with realism and a smooth, natural balance that's impossible not to like.

True, these speakers won't fill enormous rooms – there are larger speakers in the R Series to fulfil that function – but powered by a decent amplifier, such as the Arcam SA20 and Naim SuperNAIT 2 I tried, they never sound in any way small or parched, but rather rich, refined and mature.

KEF has produced a design with a sound to rival not only anything in its price-class, but also some much larger designs from other brands. These are speakers you really need to hear. 

ESSAY

‘What? Oh, I said, “DOESN’T IT sound good?”’

If recorded music appears to have become audio wallpaper, why bother with hi-fi at all?

A couple of months ago I considered the organisation of hi-fi shows, inspired (or otherwise) by visits to some of last Autumn’s rash of events. And then, late in November, something reminded me that, however well-organised an event may be, there’s always one factor those running it can’t control – the visitors.

Of late, I’ve become increasingly annoyed by the noise-floor in hi-fi demonstrations – and no, I don’t mean the thumping bass coming from the next room, nor the asthmatic wheezing and buzzing of hotel air-conditioning systems struggling to cope with rooms packed with far more bodies than usual.

I haven’t sat in a single listening session where there hasn’t been at least one conversation going on’

Instead, the problem is those uncontrollable visitors who seem to have developed a penchant for having a bit of a chat during demonstrations. Of late it seems I haven’t sat in a single listening session where there hasn’t been at least one conversation going on, and my record to date is six simultaneously, including one very loud one between the people ostensibly running the room, concerning where they were going to eat that evening.

Trouble is, as the level of the music being played changes, so does that of the conversations, rather in the manner of one of those clever car radios that increases the volume as you drive faster, to counter the greater mechanical noise. Of course, this can be problematic if those talking get caught unawares by a piece ending suddenly: I recently heard just such an event when the people in front of me were almost bawling at each other, the exchange ending with, ‘What? Oh, I SAID, “DOESN’T IT sound good?”’

This was brought home to me when I had the misfortune to watch an episode of the BBC’s reality show *The Apprentice*, in which the contestants were endeavouring to sell modern art to decorate Linn’s showroom ‘house’ at its Glasgow factory. MD Gilad Tiefenbrun offered to play them the company’s flagship hi-fi system, then sat with growing bemusement as the trio of



The Apprentice contestants visit high-end audio experts Linn

Lord Sugar wannabees commented about the system, asked if it did surround sound, and then started their sales pitch over the music. All this despite what is clearly Linn’s strange belief that anyone investing £100k or whatever in a hi-fi system to make the most of their music, might actually just want to sit and listen to it.

I shared his confusion – well, when I managed to uncurl my toes: there really does seem to be little point in spending money to have an artistic or emotional experience, then not concentrating on whatever you’ve paid to enjoy.

I get that you might want to share one’s enthusiasm for what you’re experiencing, or indeed express your criticism if you’re less than delighted, but surely that’s something that happens at the end of what’s being played, not during it. I mean, I understand you might want to discuss a song that’s just popped up on the radio, but when you have paid a lot of money for a hi-fi system, or indeed made a conscious decision to go to a hi-fi show and hear some systems, nattering through the demonstrations seems somewhat counter-productive, not to mention annoying for those of us who are actually trying to listen.

True, for reasons I considered a couple of months back, a hi-fi show isn’t the ideal place to hear exactly what a system can do (even though I’ve read more than a few online reviews of products written after just a brief listen at a show or a press demonstration), but at least a quiet demonstration room will give you a fighting chance of getting some kind of impression.

Of course, it may be that I share with Mr Tiefenbrun a curiously old-fashioned view of how one consumes music: maybe in the age of ‘free’ music online, albums giving way to ‘songs’ and everything reduced to bite-sized chunks, the new normal is that music is in the background, as a wallpaper against which one lives one’s life. Or maybe we’re all so busy that we can’t spare the time just to devote ourselves purely to listening and have to do other things at the same time?

If that’s the case, you can see why so many seem happy to have their music playing through their phone’s built-in sound system, or via an inexpensive Bluetooth speaker. Ah yes, says the hi-fi industry, but all we really need to do is expose them to how good their favourite music can be when played on a high-quality hi-fi system.

Oh really? It seems that the young professionals of *The Apprentice*, when confronted by a system which is – whatever you think of the way Linn does things – one of the best money can buy, simply didn’t know how to react. And though they may hardly be representative of Linn’s future customer base, that hardly bodes well for the future of interest in high-quality audio systems: explaining my reaction to the TV show to a younger friend, the response wasn’t, ‘How rude of them to talk over the music’, but, ‘What’s the problem? It’s only music – everyone does that’.

Me? I’m going to stick to my funny old-fashioned ways: few things are as satisfying as good music, in a fine performance and recording, played on a top-quality hi-fi system – with no distractions. 

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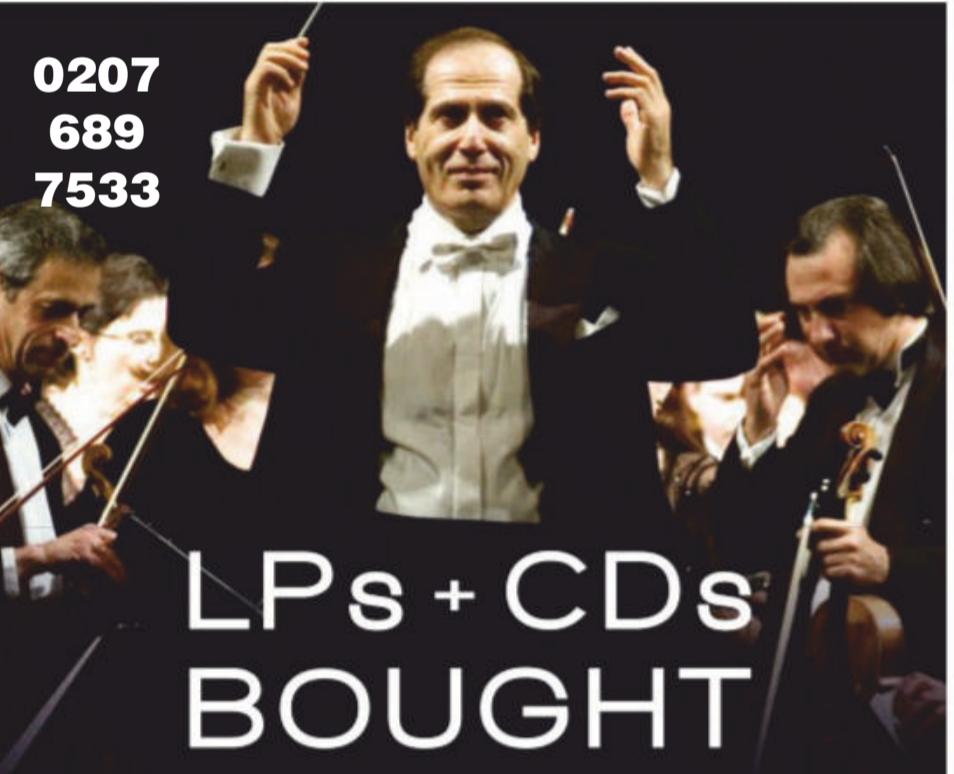
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NOTES & LETTERS

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Harty's Berlioz

In his otherwise penetrating article on Berlioz (February, page 16), Tim Ashley regrettably didn't mention one of the seminal British conductors of this composer – Sir Hamilton Harty (1879–1941). As Chief Conductor of the Hallé Orchestra (1920–33) he programmed *The Damnation of Faust* (1920), *Symphonie fantastique* and *Harold in Italy* (1922), *Symphonie funèbre et triomphale* (1923), *Grande Messe des morts* (1925 at which French critics were present), *Romeo and Juliet* (1927) and *Les Troyens* (1928). On March 4, 1936 he conducted the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Choral Society (450 musicians) in performances of the *Grande Messe des morts* and the *Symphonie funèbre*. JA Forsyth of *The Star* reported the concert as 'a triumph for Harty and the composer for whom he has done so much'.

True he wasn't the first to introduce Berlioz to this country. As Tim Ashley said, the composer did that himself; and after his death his friend Charles Hallé extended the mission. But Harty continued the crusade in the next century and also left some 78s for posterity.

All but one (*King Lear* Overture) of Harty's recordings were transferred to CD by Pearl, and now Pristine Audio has just published the set, newly refurbished.

*Nalen Anthoni
London W13*

Bliss from Brno

I went to the cinema twice last week, *Collette* and *The Favourite* both good films but, compared to *The Cunning Little Vixen* streamed on OperaVision from Brno, no competition (January, page 115). So, once again, thank you *Gramophone* for the recommendation. As Mark Pullinger wrote, that wonderful, 'state of bliss' as the opera ends is overwhelming, as was the whole production. I watched it all again a few evenings later.

*Patrick Lessware
via email*

Great not-so-great music

Your January Collection discussed great pianists playing great music (Beethoven's *Waldstein* Sonata). But I should like to draw attention to great pianists playing no-so-great music. I refer to Hyperion's Romantic Piano Concerto series.

Letter of the Month



A great Bruckner interpreter: Sergiu Celibidache

Celibidache's genius

I think it was in 1982 that I was decorating my recently bought first house. BBC Radio 3 was on in the background. As I painted, I became aware of the most extraordinary performance of the Mussorgsky/Ravel *Pictures at an Exhibition*. I put down my brush and sat, transfixed, until it concluded with the most spectacularly over-the-top rendition of 'The Great Gate of Kiev' imaginable.

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So began my enthusiasm for the music making of Sergiu Celibidache (Box-set Round-up, February, page 101). Sadly, opportunities for further listening were somewhat limited due to the great man's reluctance to make commercial recordings, until, following his death, the release of the Munich-era CDs began. Then, what a revelation Celi's Bruckner was. This was Bruckner as I'd always imagined it should be, but until now, never had been.

Five years ago I met my, now wife, Jan and have introduced her to much classical music and it has most certainly been Bruckner à la Celi that has made the greatest impact. The problem is that, sadly now, other Bruckner performances often disappoint by comparison. Live there have been exceptions in No 4 – both Kirill Karabits and Yannick Nézet-Séguin hit the spot. However, when it comes to recorded Fourths, it has to be Celibidache. That finale, with its coda to which Rob Cowan referred, is magnificent indeed.

*Paul Giles
via email*

**PRESTO
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There are no previously undiscovered masterpieces but there is much very good and highly enjoyable music. There is also, it must be said, a good deal of rather undistinguished material, of vacuous finger-plaiting passagework designed to show off the dexterity of the composer who typically wrote it for his own use. Not one single performance in the 40 volumes I have bought is less than excellent.

A pianist learning a standard-repertoire concerto can expect being repaid dozens of times over a playing career. Yet mastery of these technically formidable pieces has been achieved for just these one-off performances.

But it is also the musicianship that makes this series special. Howard Shelley, for example, can float the most trivial theme or melody giving it

shape and poise; or listen to the way Jonathan Plowright imbues the somewhat conventional bombast of Stojowski's climaxes with a genuine *nobilmente*. There is so much tremendous music-making to be enjoyed thanks to the dedication of these fine pianists.

The recording industry can do things which would otherwise not have happened – in the 1930s, the Schnabel-Beethoven recordings, in the '50s and '60s the Solti *Ring* cycle, in the '70s Dorati's Haydn project. And now the Romantic Piano Concerto series. But for the dedication and musicianship of these wonderful pianists, their accompanying orchestras and Hyperion Records, this is music which we would never hear.

*Dr Michael H B Morton
Surbiton, Surrey*

OBITUARIES

A genre-hopping composer, an inspiring baritone and a French great

MICHEL LEGRAND

Composer, singer, conductor, pianist and producer

Born February 24, 1932

Died January 26, 2019



Legrand was born into a family with strong musical heritage. He quickly displayed a prodigious talent on a number of instruments and

enrolled at the Paris Conservatoire in 1942 at the age of 10. Although taught by, among others, Nadia Boulanger and fascinated by the work of Schubert, it was a 1947 Paris concert given by the jazz trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie which most profoundly influenced a young Legrand, and within two years he was a proficient jazz pianist and theorist. By 1958, he was playing alongside Miles Davis, John Coltrane and Bill Evans.

He was already pursuing a parallel career as a film composer, winning three Oscars, perhaps his most celebrated contributions being the scores to *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* (1964) and *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968).

Legrand's passion for classical music never dimmed, however, and he wrote several sonatas, a grand ballet, and concertos for the piano, cello and harp.

SANFORD SYLVAN

Baritone and teacher

Born 1953

Died January 29, 2019



Sanford Sylvan has died at the age of 65. He is perhaps best known for the long-standing relationships he cultivated with modern composers.

Sylvan graduated from the Manhattan School of Music before enrolling at the Juilliard Preparatory School and then Boston's Tanglewood Music Center. He would go on to perform with the world's major orchestras and opera companies, and he made his debut at Glyndebourne Festival in 1994 performing the role of Leporello in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.

Among the contemporary works which Sylvan premiered were *The Lighthouse* by Peter Maxwell Davies and Philip

Glass's *The Juniper Tree*. He was closely associated with John Adams, whose setting of Walt Whitman's *The Wound Dresser* he recorded twice. He also created the roles of Chou En-Lai in the opera *Nixon in China* and the title part in *The Death of Klinghoffer*. He frequently worked with the director Peter Sellars.

In a 1993 *Gramophone* interview Sylvan, despite his busy operatic schedule, professed his main love of song, and in this domain he recorded a disc of Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin* in 1992.

BLANDINE VERLET

Harpsichordist and teacher

Born February 27, 1942

Died December 30, 2018



Verlet, who has died at the age of 76, was inspired by her brother's records of the Polish-French harpsichordist Wanda Landowska, to take up her instrument at the age of nine. She began her studies at the Paris Conservatoire in 1957. Under the tutelage of Huguette Dreyfus she won a prize which would facilitate a concert career spanning France and Italy. Continuing her studies, Verlet went to the USA to work at Yale with Ralph Kirkpatrick who proved to be a less than enthusiastic teacher.

She released the first of two recordings of JS Bach's *Goldberg Variations* on Philips in 1978, but it is the second, released in 1992 after her switch to Astrée, that particularly stands out. In 2013, when dedicating its Collection to *Goldberg* recordings, *Gramophone* said that 'even when considering the wealth of world-class harpsichord interpretations recorded over the past two decades, Verlet's seasoned artistry withstands the test of time'.

Verlet is also especially remembered for her remarkably comprehensive understanding of the work of François Couperin, whose complete keyboard works she recorded during the 1970s and '80s. In her very last recording in 2018 – her 21st of her compatriot's music – she dedicated an impassioned essay and even a poem to him in her booklet notes.

Verlet became a sought-after teacher of French harpsichord repertoire, passing on her knowledge to a younger generation including Jean Rondeau.

NEXT MONTH APRIL 2019



Classical Music in China

We explore classical music's extraordinary growth in China – from new concert halls to DG's signing of Long Yu and the Shanghai Symphony – and ask, where does it go from here?

Alban Gerhardt

We meet the cellist as he marks his 50th birthday by recording Bach's suites for Hyperion

Summer Festival Guide 2019

As the weather turns to spring, thoughts turn to summer – our comprehensive annual guide to the most exciting festivals, in cities and scenic countryside, throughout the world

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Roger Waters

Co-founder of Pink Floyd, the guitarist, singer and composer on classical music in his life

There was never any music in the house where I grew up. My mother always claimed to be tone deaf. And till the day she died, she said that she had no idea what music was. She might have just as well been listening to a washing machine. And so no, there was nothing. The first kind of music I ever heard in the house was excerpts from *The Mikado* – Gilbert and Sullivan. I think an auntie gave me a 78.

I did sing in the combined choir of the county, which was made up of the Cambridgeshire High School for Boys and the Cambridgeshire High School for Girls. The only way to ever meet the girls was to be in the combined choir. So I sang treble when I was about 12. One of the pieces that we sang, I can remember to this day! It was from Borodin's *Prince Igor*.

I remember going on some kind of Labour Party or Communist Party junket to London and seeing *Salad Days* – 'Oh look at me, I'm dancing!' – which is very like 'Three little maids' from *The Mikado*. Then came *West Side Story* which was like a nuclear bomb going off. What a huge revolutionary statement *West Side Story* was. I saw a production in London in about 1960 and was just completely blown away by it. And then the movie came out. I mean, it did reinvent everything, didn't it? It also started a kind of revolution by writing about social history and contemporary society.

I didn't really make an attachment to any kind of classical music till I was about 20. I'd bought a pair of good speakers called Celestion Ditton 15s. And I think I wanted to play stuff through them that wasn't just what I was normally listening to, which was blues and jazz and that sort of thing. So at a certain point I developed a big attachment to 19th-century music in general, but to Berlioz, in particular. The *Symphonie fantastique*, for instance, is scored as if Berlioz knew how modern recording techniques were going to develop, because it's scored in a completely different way from anything that happened before. In it he pushes sections up as if they were mixed individually and there was somebody sitting there at the desk going 'whoa'. You can suddenly hear the trombone section playing, you know? So that appealed to me. Also what appealed with Berlioz, particularly, is when you listen to the *Te Deum* you think, if this guy had had a PA system, this is a huge kind of anthemic stadium rock, but done for St Paul's Cathedral or St Peter's in Rome!

I've never thought this before, but Berlioz in his other big choral works and operas has drawn a kind of emotional response from me because of the grandeur of the experience of being immersed in that kind of beauty. The last time I played to hundreds of thousands of people was Zócalo Square, Mexico in 2016. The time before was in Berlin in 1990. You don't play to hundreds of thousands of people very often, but the connection with the audience is extraordinary.



THE RECORD I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT



Berlioz *Symphonie fantastique*

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Symphonie fantastique is scored as if Berlioz knew how modern recording techniques were going to develop.

There's a song I wrote called 'Perfect Sense' with a huge chorus, which I manufactured electronically. It's meant to be a football crowd singing. It's very Berlioz in terms of its instruction to our emotions to empathise with the message, and to join in with your god. So the influences are there and the vastness of the works comes from the scoring of religious music for the adoration of something bigger than ourselves. My adoration, of course, is for perfect sense. It has nothing to do with a god. It's an adoration of the ideas that we human beings might finally figure out that we are in a unique position of power, and that we're destroying ourselves, and that we don't have to. We could go, 'No, we don't want to do this.' We can get rid of the oligarchs, and the warmongers, and the money managers, and the hedge funds, and ask, 'What actually brings us joy in our lives?' Well, what brings us joy in our lives is delving into our innate capacity to empathise with other human beings. And music is one of the purest forms of human communication. It transcends creed, colour, the lot. 

Roger Waters's Sony Classical recording of Stravinsky's The Soldier's Tale was reviewed by Tim Ashley in December

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